

Local perspectives on vulnerability and capacity in Aden: Aden city

OVERVIEW

More than nine years of conflict in Yemen has left 18.2 million people in need of assistance in one of the largest and most complex humanitarian responses in the world (OCHA 01/02/2024). The pervasiveness of needs and protracted nature of the crisis have spawned repeated cycles of emergency humanitarian assistance to support a large population in need. Instead of addressing the underlying causes of vulnerability, these cycles have focused primarily on meeting immediate needs; as a result, enhancing capacity has received limited attention. Conditions in Yemen, however, are changing. Since the April–October 2022 truce, major clashes have largely ceased. Although tensions remain, confrontations between conflicting parties have fallen markedly (Rand 13/12/2023; ACLED accessed 01/03/2024).

As the crisis is considered to be at a critical juncture, there is an opportunity to focus beyond immediate needs and consider the drivers of and reasons for the persistence of such needs (OCHA 01/02/2024). Although a durable settlement to the conflict remains elusive, there is growing recognition of the need to focus on assistance that both meets immediate needs and build capacity.

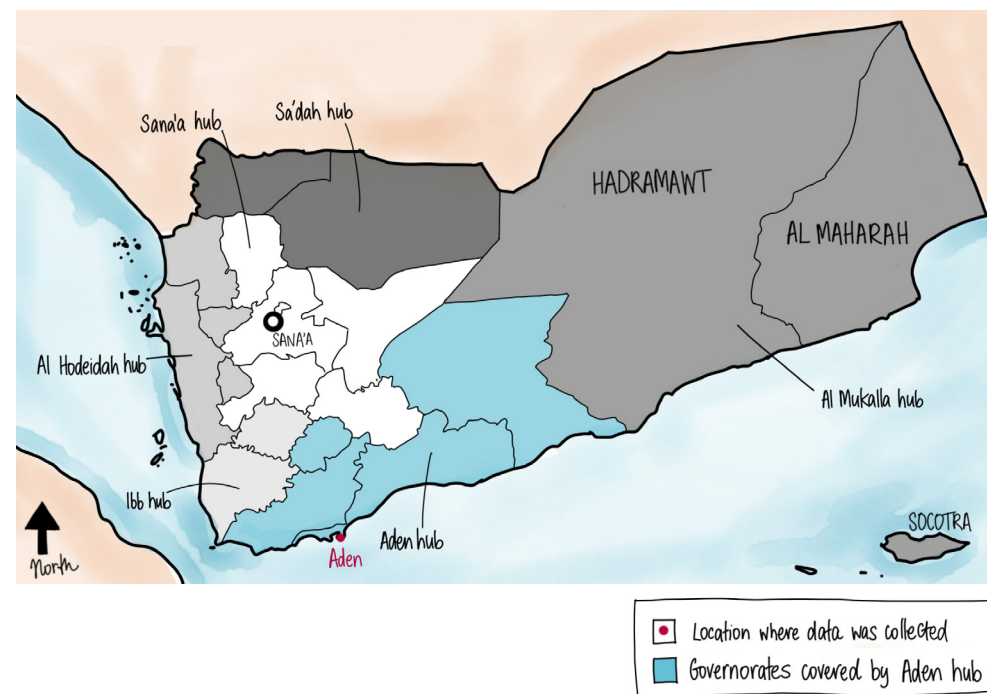
ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is the second in a series of six localised studies. Primary data collected in the different locations aims to identify potential entry points to improve program designs and targeting by:

- providing insight into the drivers of multidimensional vulnerability
- revealing local perceptions of which categories of people are most vulnerable to being unable to meet their needs
- contributing to understanding how people are coping with challenges and meeting their needs.

This approach is based on the idea that an understanding of how households meet needs can help inform ways of enhancing these capacities, avoiding their degradation, and, where appropriate, providing alternatives to strategies that have or will have negative outcomes.

Map 1. Areas covered by humanitarian hubs in Yemen



Source: ACAPS using data from OCHA (04/06/2018)

The purpose of taking a localised approach is to identify any location-specific causes and manifestations of vulnerability and better understand how people face these. An understanding of the causes of vulnerability and available capacities by location may reveal differences that can inform programming, making interventions more context-specific and impactful. The areas selected for these six studies are based around the humanitarian coordination hubs established for the response in Yemen. This study reflects findings from inside Aden city, the seat of a humanitarian response hub by the same name.

Aim

This analysis intends to support humanitarian assistance planning and implementation by enhancing understanding of the factors affecting people's overall vulnerability in Aden city and their capacity to meet their own needs. This report is intended as a tool to support the identification of programmatic entry points by providing insight on three questions.

- What are the main drivers of vulnerability?
- Which categories of people are seen as at a heightened risk of vulnerability (i.e. those most likely to have unmet basic needs)?
- What capacity to overcome vulnerability do people and their communities possess?

Table 1. Definitions of concepts used in the report

KEY CONCEPTS	
Vulnerability	This research defines vulnerability as a situation in which people are likely to have unmet basic needs, experience harm, or have their interests overlooked (ICRC 01/03/2018).
Multidimensional vulnerability	Multidimensional vulnerability describes a state of vulnerability existing across more than one of the dimensions of vulnerability considered in this analysis. In this report, it describes the way in which vulnerability in one area has an impact on vulnerability in others.
Category (of people)	Here, we use categories of people to refer to individuals similar to one another in a certain way, e.g. having the same ethnicity, gender, religion, or nationality. We use it to differentiate between a category of people and a social group, which refers to "two or more people who regularly interact on the basis of mutual expectations and who share a common identity" (UC Davis accessed 14/03/2024). People may be in the same category, e.g. women, and not necessarily have common beliefs or ideas.
Capacity	In this report, capacity describes the resources, tools, knowledge, or structures used to overcome a circumstance of vulnerability.
Resilience	Resilience is the capacity to withstand, overcome, or circumvent the conditions that shocks of any kind can bring about (OCHA 11/05/2013).
Basic needs	Basic needs is a term often used in refugee and displacement contexts and references access to "basic services and assistance in health, protection, nutrition, WASH, food, shelter, energy, education, domestic items, and specialised services for people with specific needs" (UNHCR 20/04/2017).
Safety net	Safety net indicates a system of informal support at the local level based on social connections and understood by those included (FIC 04/2022).

2. KEY FINDINGS

- **The vulnerability people in Aden city face is almost always multidimensional and cannot be separated along sectoral lines.** Factors that drive vulnerability affect multiple aspects of people's lives, and vulnerability in one area frequently accompanies vulnerability in others.
- **Five main drivers of vulnerability were identified.**
 - **Economic conditions** remain linked to price inflation for key goods such as food and fuel, reduced purchasing power, and increased costs in accessing key services.
 - **Conflict-driven insecurity** results in protection risks and reduced mobility and access to livelihoods. Women and girls seldom leave home without a male guardian, and all household members avoid going out after dark for fear of clashes.
 - **Conflict-related state fragility** is a separate but related concern resulting in the deterioration of utility provision and degraded administration of state services, particularly sanitation and water for drinking and household use. Respondents noted significant issues with sewage and wastewater management which, when paired with flooding risks, pose a major risk to health in parts of Aden city.
 - **Climate and environmental risks**, including flooding, are a major concern, particularly risks resulting from the prevalence of issues related to improperly treated sewage. Respondents said that interrupted electricity service has led to an increase in fatalities among older people in the summer heat.
 - **Social norms** that limit access to certain social spaces and perpetuate exclusion based on gender, age, ethnicity, or disability status. For instance, gender norms contribute to women's limited mobility outside the home, which in turn leaves women less able to access cooler public spaces during periods of intense heat.
- Respondents in Aden stated that both **local authorities and NGOs have been ineffective**, as service gaps widen as a result of the weakening of the state. This perception was fuelled by a belief that services, such as state-provided healthcare, have been overwhelmed by the influx of IDPs and other users.
- Government and aid providers were both singled out as **aloof and unresponsive** to needs. In particular, respondents said that Al Muhamasheen, IDPs, and others lacking strong social ties within the community are not heard and struggle to access services and aid.
- **People rely heavily on family and neighbours as a source of practical support.** Social bonds are weakened, however, by economic and transportation barriers that prevent socialising.

- **Informal and ad-hoc youth initiatives have been important stopgap measures** providing tutoring and education for children withdrawn from school, and youth ensure the homebound continue to receive daily essentials.
- **Four groups were consistently identified as most vulnerable to having unmet basic needs in Aden city.** Individuals may belong to one or more of these groups simultaneously.
 - **People with disabilities** were identified as either most vulnerable or tied for most vulnerable in three of the key dimensions considered: access to basic services, mobility and freedom of movement, and food security. Respondents expressed that people with disabilities have less access to the main coping strategies, including income-generating activities.
 - **Al Muhamasheen** were identified as either most vulnerable or tied for most vulnerable in four key dimensions of analysis: climate and environmental risk, shelter and housing, access to healthcare, and access to food. Al Muhamasheen were identified as particularly vulnerable as a result of their lack of access to social networks and systems of support and limited livelihood opportunities
 - **Older people** were also identified as highly vulnerable to climate and environmental risks, particularly heat. Older people were also seen as having less access to livelihoods.
 - **Women** were identified as being at-risk due to restrictions on their mobility and freedom of movement underpinned by gender norms, as well as less access to sources of capacity, such as social and economic capital.

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BACKGROUND

Aden hub

This analysis is based on data collected in Aden city in December 2023. Aden city is the chief port of southern Yemen and the administrative capital of Aden governorate. The OCHA-designated Aden Operational Hub covers five governorates: Abyan, Ad Dali', Aden, Lahj, and Shabwah (OCHA 04/06/2018). The region served by the hub encompasses a narrow strip of populated coastal lowlands bounded by the Gulf of Aden and bordered in the north by rugged mountains and arid desert plains. An estimated 4.58 million people live in the governorates covered by the Aden hub, of whom more than 464,000 are IDPs (OCHA 30/06/2023). The governorates covered by the hub are administered almost entirely by forces aligned with the Internationally Recognized Government of Yemen (IRG). Throughout southern Yemen, the most powerful of these forces is the Southern Transitional Council (STC) – an influential player in the bloc opposing the de-facto authority (DFA) in the north of Yemen (also known as the Houthis) – which has both cooperated and clashed with other IRG-aligned forces. These clashes and the continuing contest for primacy in southern Yemen contribute to weakened governance and continued insecurity.

Aden city and its surrounding areas remain heavily controlled by checkpoints erected by various armed factions. Aden port has witnessed a surge in activity and is positioned to receive additional cargoes, as shippers seek to avoid the logistical, security, and insurance costs associated with the current DFA blockade of Red Sea ports, namely Al Hodeidah port (ACLEDAccessed 23/03/2024; KII 21/03/2024).

The urban sprawl of Aden city stretches across both Aden and Lahj governorates. The city is Yemen's internationally recognised capital and the largest city on the southern coast, becoming the seat of IRG power after the fall of Sana'a to DFA fighters in 2015. To the north of Lahj is **Ad Dali' governorate**, a small territory split into a southern half governed by the IRG, and a northern half that is still being militarily contested (ACLEDAccessed 22/03/2024). Aden city's economy revolves around seaborne activity, including traditional fishing and commercial shipping via Aden port – Yemen's most active – which is a hub for Red Sea shipping and overland logistics and trade with the rest of the country (UN-Habitat 01/11/2020).

Aden city and its environs have witnessed political and military tumult since 2018, when President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi settled in the city (ACLEDAccessed 20/03/2024). Aden city and its surroundings have since experienced localised skirmishes, violent clashes, and bouts of heavy conflict between various anti-DFA armed factions, including those backed by

the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. In 2019, the STC took control of the city, having made inroads beginning in 2018 (ICG 04/05/2024; ACLEDAccessed 28/03/2024). Although the STC has retained control over the city's main political and military apparatuses, forces backed by Saudi Arabia have made a steady push for greater control, spearheaded by the Nation Shield Forces (ACLEDAccessed 20/03/2024).

Abyan governorate stretches lengthwise along Yemen's southern coast, bounded by Aden and Lahj governorates to the west, mountain ranges to the north, Shabwah governorate to the east, and the Gulf of Aden to the south. Abyan is predominantly under the control of STC-aligned forces, and the frontlines with DFA forces in the north of the governorate have been quiet in recent years (ACLEDAccessed 22/03/2024). Since 2022, Abyan has seen an STC counter-terrorism campaign seeking to uproot al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), whose operational centre is in Abyan.

Shabwah governorate, east of Abyan, is a vast and sparsely populated territory spanning the mountain highlands and stretching to the Gulf of Aden coast. Shabwah is rich in hydrocarbons; it is one of Yemen's most active oil-producing regions and is home to critical oil and gas infrastructure, including pipelines and the Balhaf liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal (ACLEDAccessed 22/03/2024). Although resource wealth has allowed the region relative autonomy, it has also resulted in escalating political and armed clashes around control over resources. In late 2022, for example, DFA drone attacks disabled export capacity. Clashes and conflict incidents spiked in the governorate in late 2021 and throughout 2022 (ACLEDAccessed 22/03/2024).

Methodology

This report is based on analysis of primary data collected in December 2023, which is supplemented by and triangulated with secondary data and expert opinions where possible. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with household representatives, focus group discussions (FGDs) with men and women from the communities, and semi-structured interviews with individuals about their experiences in their communities. Respondents were purposively selected with a focus on groups and categories of people understood from pre-existing research to be at high risk of unmet basic needs. Data was collected in person in Aden city.

Table 2. Summary of primary data collection methods and samples

PRIMARY DATA SOURCE	NUMBER	DETAILS, INCLUDING INDICATIONS OF POSSIBLE VULNERABILITY
Household semi-structured interviews	20 in total	9 household interviews with men 11 household interviews with women 3 IDP households 6 households included a member with a disability 11 households that self-identified as Al Muhamasheen 10 households that self-identified as economically vulnerable before the war 20 individuals representing approximately 165 individuals (including women, men, girls, and boys), based on the average number of household members in Aden city according to the most recent data from 2016 (GDL accessed 24/03/2024)
FGDs	11 in total	Each focus group was convened with approximately 5–8 people per group Approximately 70 people in total
Semi-structured interviews with individuals about their experiences in their community	5 in total	3 interviews with men 2 interviews with women
Total number of individuals consulted		Overall, approximately 95 individuals were consulted in the development of this report Household discussions reflected the experiences of all household members, not only those of the individual responding Overall, the information reflects the experiences of approximately 240 people

Semi-structured interview guidelines and questionnaires included a combination of open, closed, and ranking questions. Secondary data and learnings from previous ACAPS studies informed these questions, designed to support consistent data collection across the locations discussed here and those featured in additional reports. The questions focused on seven key dimensions related to vulnerability relevant across Yemen (Table 3). These dimensions were selected after consultation with aid practitioners and conflict analysts and based on topics that avoided sensitive questions related to gender-based violence and other protection concerns. Information on protection issues was gathered from secondary data sources, including recent gender and protection-focused reports developed by ACAPS in Yemen.

Table 3. Seven key dimensions relating to vulnerability in Yemen

ANALYSIS DIMENSION	ISSUES TO UNDERSTAND
Healthcare access	Has healthcare changed during the conflict? If so, how? Have the changes affected people's capacity to access healthcare? If so, how? Which groups and categories of people have the hardest time accessing healthcare (i.e. who are most vulnerable to reduced healthcare access and unmet needs in relation to health)?
Access to sufficient food (both quality and quantity)	Has food access changed? If so, how? Which groups and categories of people are most vulnerable to insufficient food and why?
Education	Has access to education changed in the community (e.g. how do children get to school)? If so, how? Are there any new or existing obstacles preventing children from attending school? Which groups and categories of children are most at risk of reduced or no access to education, and what barriers do they face?
Freedom of movement and access to transport	Are there barriers to movement and transportation? If so, what are they? Which groups and categories of people face the greatest difficulty moving freely and why? Do impeded freedom of movement and access to transport affect people's ability to meet basic needs? If so, how?
Access to key utilities (basic services indicate the key utilities of water, electricity, and communication networks)	Has access to and the availability of key utilities changed during the conflict? If so, how? Which groups and categories of people face the greatest difficulty moving freely and why? Does the reduced access to and availability of key utilities affect people's ability to meet basic needs? If so, how?
Housing and shelter	Have housing and types of dwellings changed during the conflict (e.g. the impact of displacement, household size, etc.)? If so, how? Which groups and categories of people face the greatest challenges in terms of living conditions and why?
Climate and environmental risks	Have climate or other environmental changes, including natural hazards, affected people's lives? If so, how? Which groups and categories of people face the greatest challenges related to climate and environmental risk and why?

Limitations and considerations when interpreting findings

This report presents the ideas and perspectives of the Yemeni men and women who spoke with the research team. The report's value lies in the context-specific information it provides on the specific locations covered. It can inform further assessments and support the granular analysis required for programme design. The report findings should be read in this light rather than be taken as representative of all people in the locations the Aden hub covers, and localised protection analysis will be required to inform implementation in other parts of the hub. The report may also provide insights relevant to categories of people and communities living in similar conditions to the locations discussed here.

As this analysis is based on respondents' perceptions, it likely reflects their biases. It should also be noted that the groups and categories of people used in this report are not rigidly defined and can overlap. They should not be interpreted as monolithic or fixed categorisations. As a qualitative study of perceptions based on a small purposive sample, the data is not representative and cannot be disaggregated by group.

This report is based on data collected in December 2023, prior to the escalation of hostilities in Yemen over the Red Sea maritime shipping blockade. As at the beginning of January 2024, monitoring data suggested that there had been no significant changes in import flows through Red Sea ports. The analysis indicates that November and December 2023 maintained steady food and fuel import volumes ([DevelopmentAid 29/01/2024](#)). As a result, this report does not address the potential future impact of hostilities should they continue or escalate.

Finally, triangulating and comparing the findings was difficult because there are only a limited number of other studies available. Regardless, ACAPS is confident that the findings present a realistic picture of people's experiences based on their resonance with other, albeit less location-specific, information on household challenges and ways of coping, conversations with Yemen experts, and background information on the area.

DRIVERS OF VULNERABILITY

Single-sector humanitarian action is not enough to address multidimensional vulnerability. Multiple factors drive vulnerability, and vulnerability in one area often leads to vulnerability in others. Challenging economic conditions lie at the heart of households' inability to meet needs. The strategies households use to address needs in one dimension can contribute to vulnerability in another. This points to the need for multisectoral programming and area-based approaches that address household and community circumstances holistically, not in silos built around individual sectors.

Respondent views indicated five main drivers of multidimensional vulnerability in Aden:

- economic conditions
- conflict-driven instability and insecurity
- state fragility effectively disabling utility provision
- climate and environmental risks
- social norms.

Deteriorating economic conditions

Deteriorating economic conditions have long been recognised as among the foremost challenges Yemenis face, with currency depreciation and intense inflation among the most significant and widely observed factors worsening humanitarian needs. Largely as a result of a 300% rise in food prices over the past five years, 17 million Yemenis are at Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of food insecurity ([Action for Humanity et al. 02/10/2023](#); [NRC 08/12/2023](#)). Recurrent disruptions to public sector salaries, sometimes only partially paid, compound the effects of currency depreciation and the rising cost of goods. As a result, Yemenis have resorted to adjusting their food consumption by eating less and lower-quality food, often prioritising children's nutritional needs, relying on credit, and resorting to coping strategies with potentially detrimental consequences, such as child labour and the sale of assets ([ACAPS 09/02/2024](#)). When reflecting on the situation in Aden city, household-level respondents identified food affordability as a top factor driving vulnerability. Of the 20 household-level respondents, 18 identified food costs as among their most significant household expenditures; ten also selected healthcare, and six selected water. In FGDs, respondents said "a majority of families" can no longer afford sufficient food, and "even private business owners have found it hard because of the weakness of trade" ([FGD 24/12/2023](#)). 12 of 20 household-level respondents indicated that reducing the number of meals they consumed was among the strategies they used to cope with high food prices.

This is in line with findings across Yemen more generally: rising food costs are driving food insecurity, not a lack of availability of food (Action for Humanity et al. 02/10/2023). In general, respondents reported reducing their consumption of red meat, fruit, chicken, cheese, fish, and milk/cream. Food affordability likely affects different members of the community in different ways, however. For instance, three of the four respondents who had reduced their consumption of vegetables self-identified as Al Muhamasheen, suggesting that Al Muhamasheen may be more sensitive to prices of rising staple goods that are – for the time being – affordable to others.

Although research indicates that Yemeni households often take out loans and purchase essential items on credit, and several respondents referenced the effects of debt, only 3 of 20 household-level respondents cited repaying debt as a major household expenditure (Nevola 2015; ACAPS 22/05/2022). It is unclear whether this was because respondents do not have access to credit, simply do not pay down their debt, or another reason altogether. Still, the data indicates that debt is a factor in the daily lives of Aden city respondents. One semi-structured interview respondent said that access to small loans or credit would be crucial to improving his household's capacity, while one FGD participant noted that some men are reluctant to travel far from home because they fear being confronted over unpaid debts (KII 23/12/2023; FGD 24/12/2023).

Respondents also said that the cost of transportation was affecting usual patterns of socialisation, indicating the extent to which financial concerns permeate various aspects of daily life. One FGD participant explained: “people used to come together in events, whether weddings, funerals, or other occasions; now, because of the difficulty accessing transportation and the rise in transportation prices, people are unable to visit each other” (FGD 24/12/2023). Religious celebrations and life-cycle events are important opportunities to build social capital and maintain familial ties. Such events can have negative financial impacts, however, as monetary gifts are customary, particularly during Eid al-Adha celebrations, and the inability to participate as such jeopardises access to social safety nets (ACAPS 22/05/2022).

Conflict-related insecurity and instability

Respondents identified clashes among armed factions and the presence of checkpoints due to the mixed military control of the city, as major drivers of multidimensional vulnerability. FGD participants frequently referenced their fear of clashes between armed groups as a key barrier to mobility and freedom of movement, particularly for female household members and children (FGD 28/12/2023). Many FGD participants also stated that fear of being caught in the crossfire or harassed at checkpoints meant their families do not venture outside their neighbourhood. Frightened by clashes and general insecurity, children also “invent excuses to avoid going to school” (FGD 24/12/2023).

Checkpoints are a common in Aden city, and assassinations, armed group clashes, kidnappings, and bombings occur on an intermittent basis (ACLEd accessed 20/03/2024). The risk to civilians is aggravated by the effects of economic decline and fractured governance. Armed group members seldom receive their salary payments in full or on time, increasing the pressure on fighters – many of whom are not local to Aden – to extort civilians (KII 21/03/2024). This kind of ‘checkpoint economy’ affects perceptions of stability and further inhibits the mobility of the civilian population.

Livelihoods have been affected by clashes, with multiple respondents describing their inability to find work because checkpoints and active fighting prevent them from reaching areas with more business and labour opportunities. One participant stated that fishermen are exposed to live fire by armed groups when at sea (FGD 28/12/2023). Another participant said that, as opposed to earlier in the conflict, people have become accustomed to the clashes and are more likely to venture out into the city. Regardless, clashes continue to have a negative impact. As one participant noted: “every day a problem or armed clash over some interest reaches us, and the victim is the ordinary citizen” (FGD 24/12/2023).

State fragility undermining utility provision

A **lack of access to reliable utilities and essential services** creates challenges at the community and household levels in Aden city. The fragmented control of armed groups and administrative services compounds challenges brought on by economic conditions, conflict, and the increased demand for services as the city's population grows, affecting the provision of utilities, including electricity, communication networks, and water. The escalating costs have burdened Yemeni households. For example, electricity is sporadic and unreliable in IRG-controlled areas, and electricity blackouts can exceed 12 hours per day in the summer (IGC 24/11/2021; ACLEd accessed 20/03/2024). This impairs the function of hospitals, schools, government offices, and businesses, and has a profound impact on affected homes. Respondents identified **the weakening of basic state services as a driver of vulnerability in Aden** and a leading factor in heightened multidimensional vulnerability. For example, three of five semi-structured interview respondents spoke of the inconsistency of electricity and water provision in Aden city, noting that a breakdown in electricity provision during the intense summer heat contributes to widespread discomfort and an increase in heat-related deaths (KII 23/12/2023). Participants were especially vocal about the impacts of poor water distribution and wastewater management, explaining that the lack of centralised water distribution in the city forces households to acquire water from local shops, which is expensive, labour-intensive, and exposes household members to protection risks outside the home (FGD 26/12/2023). Service shortfalls also have negative multidimensional impacts socially. Host community respondents said that health services and electricity, water, and internet networks have been further strained by the growing number of users; several

respondents attributed this to the influx of IDPs from Al Hodeidah, driving social tensions between host populations and IDPs. One female semi-structured interview respondent in Aden city said the decline in utility provision has caused **“the disintegration of society and an increase in poverty”** (KII 25/12/2023). One male semi-structured interview respondent said the decline in utility provision has contributed to a **“moral decline... [which has] increased problems among families and increased the number of cases of divorce”** as a result of rising needs, limited income, and the increased pressures of household management (KII 25/12/2023).

Respondents frequently associated service needs with **the serial failures of state and local authorities**. Several semi-structured interview respondents attributed the deterioration of utility provision to poor governance, described by one participant as “mismanagement and a lack of oversight” by the authorities (FGD 26/12/2023). One FGD participant said that service challenges have persisted for over a decade “without any resolution, despite the false promises of repair” (FGD 24/12/2023). Participants generally indicated that conditions have worsened, however, as a result of neglect or misallocation of resources by authorities. Another FGD participant said that electricity services are weak “because of random cables, the absence of repairs, and mismanagement through favouritism” (FGD 24/12/2023). Another participant stated that, as a result of these conditions, “trust between citizens and authorities has been stripped away” (FGD 24/12/2023). Rising utility costs and diminished state revenues are factors further limiting the capacity of service networks to meet demand (ACLEDA accessed 20/03/2024). In the meantime, associated costs have been pushed onto ordinary people, as they are required to spend “large sums of money to plug the gap left by the erosion of these services” (FGD 24/12/2023).

Climate and environmental risks

Respondents indicated that climate and environmental risks are significant drivers of vulnerability in Aden city, with **wastewater management issues the most frequently identified, aggravated by flooding and extreme heat**. 14 of 20 household-level respondents said that flooding was a primary issue of concern, and ten identified extreme heat.

Yemen ranks third highest globally in terms of climate vulnerability and is among the countries least prepared to withstand climate shocks (EC-JRC 11/05/2022). 18 of 20 household-level respondents said that **health concerns were a primary impact of climate and environmental risks in Aden**, with flooding, heavy rains, and related wastewater contamination the issues most frequently mentioned. Household-level and FGD respondents indicated that poor sanitation and lack of infrastructure to properly manage wastewater increases the likelihood that heavy rains and floodwaters will mix with contaminated water and enter their homes, causing water damage and “spreading disease” (FGD 28/12/2023; Household interview 28/12/2023).

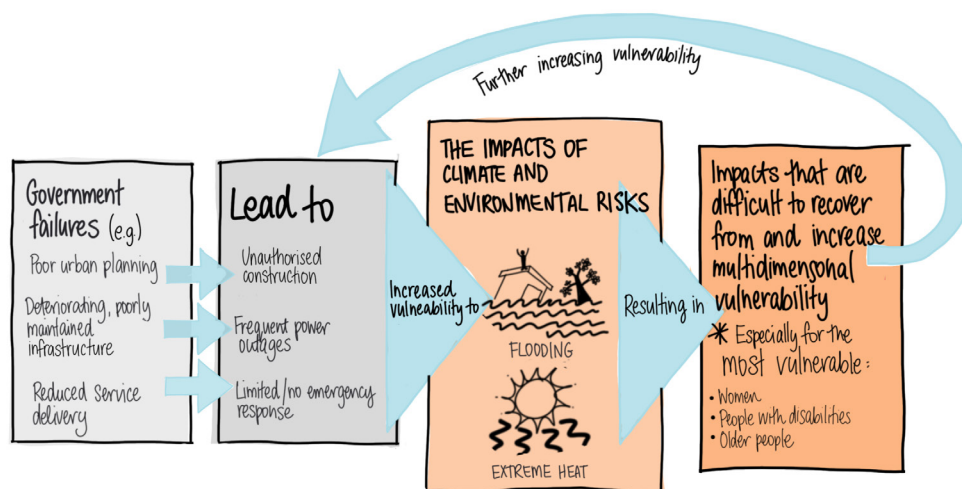
Several respondents also said that stagnant water provides a breeding ground for mosquitos, a vector of insect-borne illness, including dengue fever (FGD 29/12/2023).

Some respondents noted that the impacts of flooding also put households under further **financial strain, as flooding damages or destroys houses, shelters, and valuable household items**. These impacts are more likely to affect marginalised populations, including Al Muhamasheen and IDPs, who are more likely than other residents to face housing discrimination and reside in substandard housing conditions or in marginal areas outside urban centres (ACAPS 14/04/2023). Extreme heat was also mentioned as a key environmental risk, largely resulting from power outages affecting fans or air conditioning in the home. Several FGD participants described heat as a major factor in heightened vulnerability and death among older people and women, who have limited capacity to leave the home and access cooler public spaces.

Climate and environmental risks in Aden city are aggravated by ineffective governance.

Participants in multiple FGDs said that appeals to local officials for improved wastewater management have gone unanswered. Several respondents said the community itself has attempted to mitigate the situation – including by digging cesspits to contain waste – but such measures were inadequate and insufficiently resourced, posing a danger to “children and the elderly” (FGD 28/12/2023). One respondent said they were unable to procure the necessary brick, stone, cement, and other materials to implement measures themselves, as the permits needed to carry out the work are expensive and issued slowly, if at all (FGD 28/12/2023). The challenge acquiring permits was cited by one participant as a major barrier to community efforts to reduce multidimensional vulnerability from environmental factors, saying “if you attempt to work without a permit, you’ll land in big trouble” (FGD 28/12/2023). Among household-level respondents, ‘none’ was the most commonly identified coping mechanism, suggesting that respondents feel they have few tools to overcome climate and environment risks.

Figure 1. Failures in service provision and governance that increase vulnerability to the impact of climate and environmental risks



Social norms

Social norms are also a driver of multidimensional vulnerability, including vulnerability based on gender, age, displacement, or disability status. Gender dynamics across Yemen vary by region, social class, and other factors. **Numerous examples of gender-based vulnerability driven by social norms emerged** from discussions with research participants in Aden city, with no clear differences in the answers of women and men. Areas of **particular concern included mobility and freedom of movement, protection, and education.** Women and adolescent girls were identified as having limited access to mobility and transportation. Although no respondents mentioned the requirement to travel with a Mahram (a male guardian), several FGD participants explained that fear of clashes between armed factions makes male accompaniment a necessity (FGD 24/12/2023). One FGD participant explained that security concerns lead women to refrain from going out at night, except in groups or when accompanied by men (FGD 25/12/2023). Economic conditions also have a disparate gender-based impact. 9 of 20 household-level respondents said that girls face more difficulty attending school, while two respondents stated that boys faced more difficulty. Among FGD participants, the majority expressed that, as a result of the high cost of education, girls were at elevated risk of being withdrawn from school, as boys' education is prioritised (FGD 27/12/2023). Circumstantial factors were also mentioned; one semi-structured interview

respondent explained that girls were more likely to be withdrawn from school because the girls school is farther away from the family home, making attending more difficult and expensive as there are increased travel costs and protection risks (KII 23/12/2023). The cost of tuition was also raised as a barrier to accessing university, especially for women and girls. Loss of access to education increases girls' risk of multidimensional vulnerability, including reduced future employment opportunities, increased child labour risks, and increased risk of early marriage.

Overall, **people with disabilities were identified as the most vulnerable group**, but the distinct drivers of vulnerability are difficult to discern. More research on the location-specific conditions of people with disabilities is needed. Other research on the lives of people with disabilities has found that they are among the most vulnerable in the country, that the discrimination and challenges they faced before the war have worsened during the conflict, and that they are often left behind when households are displaced and, leaving them to face extreme challenges alone and possible exclusion from humanitarian assistance (HI 23/05/2022). Respondents in Aden city frequently specified that people with disabilities face elevated risk in areas such as healthcare access, for which limited services are spread among a growing population. The most commonly articulated source of vulnerability among people with disabilities, however, is the perception that they lack social connections and the means to support themselves, which is particularly impactful given that access to livelihoods and social capital are critical means of meeting needs.

Various forms of racial and ethnic discrimination also contribute to social exclusion.

Examples of this mostly relate to AI Muhamasheen, who are traditionally employed in menial occupations, such as street cleaning and rubbish collection. AI Muhamasheen have limited access to conventional social structures, and their perceived African ethnic origins contribute to a broader set of material challenges fuelled by social stigma (ACAPS 14/08/2022). Social norms further affect access to support, examined in greater detail in section 7.1 below. Household-level respondents identified AI Muhamasheen as one of the most vulnerable groups in terms of access to utilities and services. When asked to explain why she identified AI Muhamasheen as a more vulnerable group overall, one female respondent said: "people's non-acceptance of them" (KII 23/12/2023).

CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE PERCEIVED AS MOST VULNERABLE

As a result of underlying social hierarchies, disparities based on status, and divergent access to sources of capacity, the drivers of vulnerability discussed above do not affect all individuals and groups equally. **Household-level respondents consistently identified the following four categories of people as the most vulnerable in Aden city:**

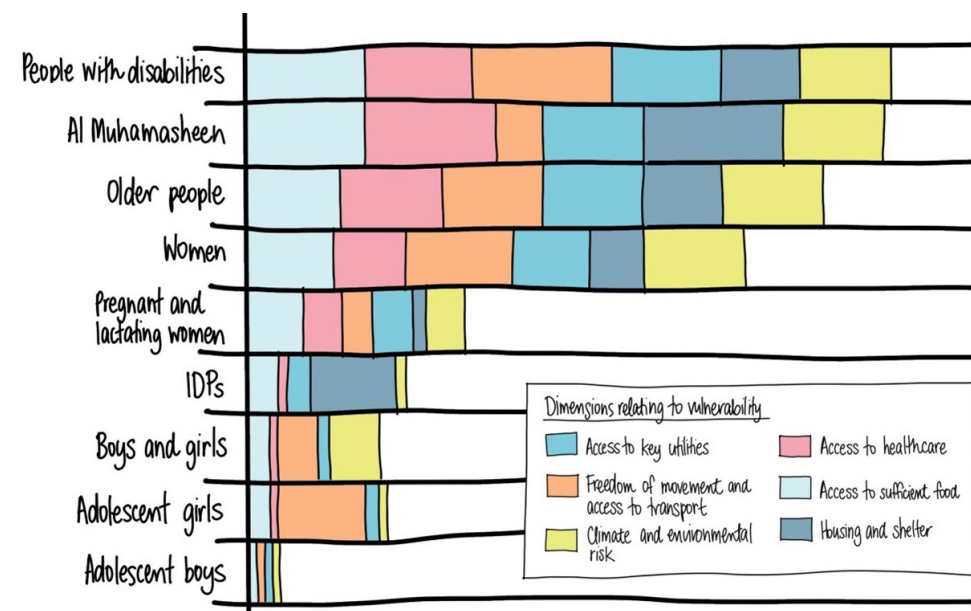
- **people with disabilities**
- **Al Muhamasheen**
- **older people**
- **women and girls.**

It should be noted that all segments of Yemeni society face drivers of multidimensional vulnerability, and the categorisations above are not exhaustive. For instance, the perception that migrants – primarily asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa and those seeking a route to labour markets in the Gulf – and IDPs in Aden city lack the interpersonal connections needed to obtain social support and access aid or services was a consistent theme in the data. People with chronic medical conditions were identified as particularly vulnerable to summertime heat waves, making the impacts of utility provision especially relevant (FGD 29/12/2023). The following text analyses the most significant contributions to multidimensional vulnerability among the groups most frequently identified as most vulnerable by respondents.

For each of the key dimensions used to frame the analysis, outlined above, household-level respondents were provided with a list of different categories of people. Some of these categories purposefully overlapped in order to gain an understanding of the extent to which age and gender affect perceptions of vulnerability. Respondents were then asked to identify **up to five categories** of people they considered most vulnerable to having unmet basic needs **for each of the key dimensions**. Although education access was included as a dimension of analysis for data collection purposes, it was excluded from the overall analysis as it applied only to school-age children and families with children. The impact of gender norms on children's access to school is discussed below.

This chart is intended as a visual aid showing how comparatively vulnerable household-level respondents in Aden city considered different categories of people across the key dimensions of analysis. The chart represents the perceptions of a small sample and does not account for intersecting vulnerabilities, such as the fact that some people belong to multiple categories (e.g. a displaced adolescent girl with a disability or an older Al Muhamasheen man).

Figure 2. Categories of people perceived as most vulnerable in relation to different dimensions



SOURCE: ACAPS

People with disabilities

Disability status can significantly affect a person's multidimensional vulnerability. In Aden city, household-level respondents identified people with disabilities as the most vulnerable overall, as well as the most vulnerable in terms of:

- **access to food** (the ranking exercise placed them equally vulnerable to Al Muhamasheen)
- **mobility and freedom of movement.**

Physical, economic, and social barriers can impede the ability of people with disabilities to meet their basic needs, often making them dependent on family members or neighbours and impinging their ability to earn money and contribute financially to the household. Semi-structured interview respondents and FGD participants frequently stated that people with disabilities in Aden city are reliant on family members, neighbours, or other members of the community to help meet their needs, including transportation, accessing services, and

obtaining food (KII 23/12/2023; FGD 26/12/2024). Over 4.8 million Yemenis live with a disability. The IRG is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but momentum to safeguard these rights has been lost since the escalation of hostilities in 2015. The term ‘disability’ encompasses a broad spectrum, so not all people with disabilities are automatically extremely vulnerable. More targeted research is needed to assess vulnerability related to disability status. It is clear, however, that disability status has a pronounced impact on mobility and access to aid and services; 81% of Yemenis with disabilities surveyed in 2022 said that they were unable to reach humanitarian services (HI 23/05/2022).

AI Muhamasheen

Social norms affecting access to livelihoods and social status play a particular role in the multidimensional vulnerability of AI Muhamasheen. In Aden city, household-level respondents identified AI Muhamasheen as the most vulnerable category in relation to four key dimensions of analysis – more than any other group – with related factors driving vulnerability in:

- **climate and environmental risks** (the ranking exercise placed them equally vulnerable to older people and women in this area)
- **shelter and housing**
- **access to healthcare**
- **access to food** (the ranking exercise placed them equally vulnerable to people with disabilities).

Nearly all the distinct drivers of AI Muhamasheen vulnerability identified by respondents, including AI Muhamasheen themselves, are products of social norms. FGD participants indicated that AI Muhamasheen are especially vulnerable to climate and environmental risks – flooding and extreme heat – because they have greater difficulty finding “stable housing” (FGD 24/12/2023). This was echoed by household-level respondents, with 18 of 20 saying AI Muhamasheen are among the most vulnerable in terms of access to shelter. According to two semi-structured interview respondents, AI Muhamasheen lack strong social connections or the money needed to buy or rent suitable dwellings. AI Muhamasheen struggle to find support because “their relationships in the community are limited, which makes it hard for them to find work or assistance ... there is favouritism in the community” (KII 23/12/23). Substandard shelter is a major driver of environmental risk, and several respondents residing in an area with a large AI Muhamasheen population called attention to unsafe housing conditions, unstable site selection, and the poor-quality building materials used by those who cannot afford more suitable dwellings (FGD 28/12/2023).

Limited income and reduced access to livelihoods are perceived as key drivers of vulnerability among AI Muhamasheen, especially in terms of access to healthcare and food, both areas most commonly identified as contributing to financial difficulty. Six of the seven household-level respondents who said casual labour is a key source of income self-identified as AI Muhamasheen. Although AI Muhamasheen have traditionally performed economic activities shunned by other members of the community, financial pressures affecting all Yemenis have meant increasing competition over such work (ACAPS 22/05/2022). If these pressures grow, AI Muhamasheen will likely face heightened multidimensional vulnerability. In describing vulnerability across the dimensions of analysis, including healthcare and food access, FGD participants frequently mentioned AI Muhamasheen alongside people with “limited income” and “poor families”, indicating the extent to which financial concerns are a paramount driver of vulnerability. The research data indicates that AI Muhamasheen may be forced to resort to more negative coping strategies to access food. Of eight household-level respondents who said reducing the number of meals they consumed was their main coping strategy to access food, seven self-identified as AI Muhamasheen. The types of foods accessible to AI Muhamasheen are also changing. As noted above, of four respondents who said they no longer consume vegetables, three identified as AI Muhamasheen.

Older people

In Aden city, household-level respondents and FGD participants frequently cited older people as among the most vulnerable categories of people. In semi-structured interviews, the perception that older people forego meals or reduce food consumption to prioritise younger family members was a frequent theme. While older people were perceived as among the more vulnerable groups in all dimensions of analysis, they were only considered the most vulnerable in one dimension: **climate and environmental risks** (the ranking exercise placed them equally vulnerable to AI Muhamasheen and women).

FGD participants were not involved in ranking categories of people in relation to perceived vulnerability, but many participants described older people as a particularly vulnerable category. The specific climate factor of **extreme heat** was repeatedly mentioned as a key risk, and multiple FGD participants said there had been an increase in deaths among older people because power outages leave households without air conditioning or fans (FGD 26/12/2023; GPA 21/01/2022). To overcome this, one participant mentioned using makeshift fans during power outages (FGD 29/12/2023).

Older people are estimated to make up 4.7% of Yemen’s population and, as a result of reduced income opportunities and access to essential services, are particularly vulnerable to unmet basic needs (HelpAge 27/03/2023). This is particularly salient in the case of health services, including medication, which have been affected by rising costs. Two household-level

respondents who said older people struggle to access medical care also noted that medication costs are high, driving some to rely on alternative forms of treatment, home remedies, or downplaying or ignoring symptoms (Household interview 23/12/2023 and 25/12/2023). A third respondent said older people lack their own means of transportation or the money to reach medical facilities (Household interview 23/12/2023).

Women

Gender norms have a pronounced impact on vulnerability across Yemen, with women and girls facing challenges and risks resulting from their gender and associated socially constructed roles and expectations. In Aden city, household-level respondents identified women as the most vulnerable category in relation to one key dimension of analysis: climate and environmental risks (the ranking exercise placed them equally vulnerable to older people and Al Muhamasheen).

Women's lack of freedom of movement outside the home is the underlying factor driving vulnerability to climate and environmental risks. Multiple FGD participants called attention to social barriers preventing women from seeking relief from extreme heat by going to public places, which are more likely to have electricity during frequent power outages, to benefit from fans or air conditioning (FGD 25/12/2023). These norms are not necessarily universal, and one FGD observed that pregnant women face particular difficulty leaving home to find relief in public places during power outages (FGD 25/12/2023). Across semi-structured interviews and FGDs, there was the recurrent perception that insecurity and fear of armed clashes lead women and girls not to leave the home.

Lack of access to the labour market, identified as an important coping strategy in response to risks in multiple sectors, is a further driver of multidimensional vulnerability among women. One household interview participant indicated that, as a result of increasing financial strain on households, more women are participating in income generation by selling popular street foods in the market (Household interview 25/12/2023). Participants in multiple focus groups, however, expressed the view that women have limited opportunities to enter the labour market. Limitations on women's ability to access key support mechanisms and income-generating opportunities is confirmed by other research on gender roles in Yemen (ACAPS 11/04/2023). This means that if anything happens to male household members, such as injury, death, or absence, women's vulnerability may increase. The negative impact of reduced economic opportunities on women's security has also been observed in the broader Yemen context (ACAPS 23/11/2023, 30/08/2023, and 11/04/2023).

FACTORS AFFECTING LOCAL CAPACITIES TO OVERCOME MULTIDIMENSIONAL VULNERABILITIES

Research respondents in Aden city spoke overwhelmingly of their communities' limited capacity to meet needs across various dimensions of vulnerability, often citing administrative and aid response failures and the limited support systems available. This is in line with other research highlighting the importance of social networks and social capital in Yemen (ACAPS 09/02/2024). Across the data, the lack of job opportunities and challenges to livelihoods was recurrently cited as an obstacle and government systems and services cited as gravely lacking, although they should be a source of support.

Communities, households, and individuals employ a range of strategies to meet their needs, including reliance on various social support systems or safety nets. The degree to which people can use such systems to meet needs and mitigate vulnerability in one or more areas depends on many factors, including the number of safety nets at one's disposal, the robustness of such safety nets, how they may have changed, the number of other people relying on them, and the depth and type of need being addressed.

Access to social capital

The value of functioning social connections and social capital

Research respondents in Aden city consistently described social networks as the most critical pillar of capacity, providing greater access to in-kind resources such as food and money, improving households' access to aid, and addressing the drivers of multidimensional vulnerability.

Family and neighbours were the two most commonly identified capacity sources in household-level interviews. 19 of 20 household-level respondents said family is a key source of support, and ten said neighbours. This finding is in line with information shared by other respondents, who said informal youth efforts are essential to filling gaps left by state utilities. Examples include ensuring the homebound acquire daily essentials and informal initiatives to tutor school-age children (FGD 28/12/2023). 4 of 20 household-level respondents said local businesses are a source of support. Notably, **no household-level respondents said NGOs or aid organisations are a key source of support.** One semi-structured interview respondent described NGOs as ineffective: "as for NGOs and charitable organisations, there is nothing worth mentioning among these groups that contribute to or help in overcoming the difficulties people face" (KII 26/12/2023). While several respondents did mention the activities of aid organisations, including mobile health clinics, the inability to access aid

was a recurrent theme, suggesting frustration over targeting criteria and coverage. Multiple respondents also articulated a belief that IDPs were favoured over host communities in aid distribution. Three of five semi-structured interview respondents suggested improving aid distribution by broadening the targeting criteria.

Access to social capital through social connections is an important and known coping strategy for many households. When faced with challenges, shocks, and unexpected needs, Yemenis commonly turn to their social networks (ACAPS 22/05/2022). **Access to social networks is a key way households cope with healthcare access challenges:** 11 of 20 household-level respondents borrowed money from within their social networks to cover healthcare costs. Similarly, 6 of 20 household-level respondents shared housing with other families to reduce monthly expenses.

While social support is often organic and highly local in nature, it can also take more institutional forms. Respondents described the *aqil* – a community leader with quasi-formal responsibilities, who sometimes liaises with outside stakeholders on behalf of the community – as a conduit for government services and aid. As one household-level respondent explained, “families now register with the neighbourhood *aqil* because they are, themselves, unable to reach institutions or aid organisations because of their distance from the area, their limited knowledge, and organisations’ lack of response to ordinary individuals” (Household interview 26/12/2023). Similarly, when asked to describe instances of community members uniting to overcome vulnerability and address issues, one respondent said: “the *aqil* meets with the imam of the mosque to solve [problems]” (KII 23/12/2023). Instances in which community members come together to address shared issues are particularly important given the diminished social contract and limited confidence in officials, a condition aggravated by shifts in armed group control and the perception of poor administration by various ruling authorities (KII 21/03/2024).

The accessibility of coping strategies that leverage social ties depends on many factors, including the robustness of such strategies and how they may have changed, the number of other people reliant on them, and the level of need being addressed. Consequently, **the degree to which social connections can support a household is linked to the capacities of others in their social network.** For example, purchasing items on credit or borrowing from friends and neighbours might solve an immediate need for essential food, but, in the medium term, credit needs to be repaid or it will cease and neighbours and friends can only lend and share when they have something to give (ACAPS 22/05/2022 and 09/02/2024).

There is evidence of fraying social ties in Aden city, in part because households are challenged to meet their own needs, given the protracted nature of the conflict and the severity of humanitarian needs. Roughly half of all household-level respondents cited the ‘security situation’, ‘lack of trust’, or the fact that many community members are consumed

with meeting their own needs as reasons why their community has not come together to solve problems. One respondent said collective action in the community “has become very difficult ... if someone speaks in the mosque about supporting a poor family or treating a sick person, the people cast doubt on what he says. Nothing happens because confidence among people has been eroded” (Household interview 23/12/2023). Another respondent cited hardship and a lack of affordable food and state utilities as causes of deteriorating “moral conditions”, also noting, “now we’re forced to lie so that shop owners give us rations for our children” (FGD 28/12/2023).

Falling outside the safety net

Capacity and support drawn from social connections are not equally available to everyone. For example, AI Muhamasheen are less able to rely on social connections to address their multidimensional vulnerability. 19 of 20 household-level respondents said AI Muhamasheen experience the most difficulty accessing social support, 14 of 20 said people with disabilities, and 12 of 20 said women and girls. In general, AI Muhamasheen tend to live together in settlements distinct from other Yemenis and face pervasive discrimination (MRG 11/2018). While AI Muhamasheen may be ready to help each other, their overarching, pre-existing economic vulnerability likely means they have limited support to give one another. Respondents frequently stated that AI Muhamasheen often face poor shelter conditions and lack the social connections needed to find support locally or make inroads with local authorities, as do women, asylum seekers from outside Yemen, IDPs, and older people.

Prevailing conditions may challenge access to various forms of social support, even for those who enjoy robust connections. For instance, respondents said the monetary cost and protection concerns associated with travelling outside their area have become barriers to regular socialising with family and friends. One respondent stated: “we no longer pay visits or take trips; we simply say ‘Praise be to God’ even at a relative’s death or marriage, and we let a phone call suffice. We used to attend in person, but we’re no longer able” (Household interview 23/12/2023). Likewise, 7 of 20 household-level respondents said their households had reduced spending on *qat*, a mild narcotic leaf chewed by Yemeni men. While *qat* is often associated with reducing the financial capital available for household priorities, its use in group settings has the potential to impart a positive, stabilising impact on communities. With reduced attendance at *qat* sessions, affected individuals may experience reduced access to settings in which social affairs, community events, and possible livelihood opportunities are discussed and reinforced (Frye 1990). Collectively, these conditions suggest that informal social safety nets in Aden city are undermined by the extent and severity of humanitarian needs.

Access to livelihoods and labour markets

Household-level respondents overwhelmingly identified income generation as one of the most important drivers of capacity in Aden city. Seeking work or additional income is the main strategy people use to address multidimensional vulnerability. The impact of additional income generation depends on the activities undertaken and the individuals involved. Hazardous labour can create new vulnerabilities, contributing to persistence or even an increase in multidimensional vulnerability. FGD respondents described searching for supplemental work at night and during holidays, potentially exposing labour-seekers to protection risks, given the widely shared sentiment that leaving home after dark can be dangerous. Similarly, several respondents described a lack of household income as a factor in the decision to withdraw children, particularly girls, from school, compounding children's vulnerability to child marriage and child labour. People who leave school and begin work early may also be confined to unskilled, low-wage jobs.

The emphasis on earning additional income is widespread; one FGD participant explained that AI Muhamasheen and other vulnerable people “have not resigned themselves” to prevailing conditions, but have sought work and small projects to supplement their income and “combat the harshness of life” (FGD 23/12/2023). Likewise, one AI Muhamasheen household-level respondent said his wife had started contributing to the family's income by applying henna for hire during social celebrations (Household interview 27/12/2023). Other respondents reported that female household members are earning money by selling ice cream or potatoes (FGD 24/12/2023). Prevailing social norms restrict certain categories of people – including women, people with disabilities, older people, IDPs, and AI Muhamasheen – from accessing the labour market. One FGD participant noted that AI Muhamasheen are perceived as particularly at risk of being compelled to enter the labour force for economic reasons (FGD 27/12/2023). Several respondents noted this trend among the general population, and one FGD participant said many young people “enlist in the army” as a means of earning a steady income (FGD 28/12/2023).

Access to government systems and services

Respondents frequently associated capacity with the function (or dysfunction) they perceived in government systems. Several respondents characterised shortcomings in government services as a contributing factor to their vulnerability, particularly in terms of climate and environmental risks and the provision of utilities. Nearly all FGD respondents who raised the matter expressed a belief that local authorities could alleviate environmental risks by addressing storm sewage and wastewater issues, but no action had yet been taken. Given the reliance on government action to improve water and sanitation services and issue the

required permits, 9 of 20 household-level respondents said they have no coping strategies to overcome environmental risks. One household-level respondent said officials are uninterested in taking steps to support the community because its population predominantly consists of AI Muhamasheen, economically vulnerable people, and IDPs (Household interview 26/12/2023). The decline in medical services, damage to facilities, and the increasing cost of care have also driven a larger number of people to seek healthcare from a diminished number of government-run facilities, leading to overcrowding and reduced access. One semi-structured interview respondent said government-provided free healthcare facilities are “always overcrowded”, preventing patients from receiving necessary care (KII 25/12/2023).

Respondents largely believed that the state should be able to provide key services to support them, but many said this was unlikely. Two-thirds of household-level respondents said that no steps are being taken to address the most important problems in their community, blaming favouritism and corruption. One semi-structured interview respondent said government services and aid are so sparse that they are “almost non-existent” in Aden city (KII 25/12/2023). Others indicated that, as a result of insecurity, government-run health facilities are too distant or inaccessible.