



## SUCCESS STORY

# Yemen Youth Breaking New Ground

### Tribal Youth Council Learns Conflict Management



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*Marib Youth Council members prepare for an exercise on conflict resolution. Photo courtesy of NDI.*

In Yemen, tribal conflict is a backdrop affecting the country's economic development, governance and national stability. Disputes over land claims and competition for resources and government services often lead to violence and cycles of revenge killings that can extend over a decade, hindering the work of government and international development agencies, and isolating citizens from the state.

Within tribes in Yemen, young people are particularly affected by, and increasingly engage in, violence. Young people are the most likely to initiate conflict or break established truces, according to research. With almost half of Yemen's population under age 15 and another third between 15 and 29, a significant percentage of the population is growing acclimated to violence as the primary means to address or resolve conflict.

To help deal with this problem, 40 young men and women under the age of 30 met in July to form the country's first cross-tribal youth council.

Located in the conflict plagued Mareb governorate, the council is part of an 18-month program to teach youth to resolve conflict and to build relationships between young people and community leaders to address issues that contribute to violence.

The council will advocate for youth to municipal and tribal leaders, learn and teach conflict prevention and problem solving skills to students, and serve as mediators among youth in their communities. This program is supported by the United States Agency for International Development's Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation.

The council was created only after a long negotiating process with tribal and government officials. Roadblocks include longstanding and fierce tribal rivalries, cultural norms that keep women largely separated from men, and the limited ability of government to deliver services and respond to the root cause of conflict.

NDI, a USAID's implementer, spent nearly two months getting buy-in for the tribal council at a series of meetings with tribal sheikhs from Al Juba, Mareb and other governorates, the deputy prime minister and minister of local administration, the governor of Mareb, ministry representatives at the local level and local councilors.

Government and tribal leaders raised concerns about the described challenges, and local leaders also feared creating de-



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mands on the government that it could not meet. But ultimately, the leaders were eager to discuss effective ways to improve youth participation in their communities and tribes and how they could play active roles in the success of the youth council initiative.

In a July launch ceremony in Al Juba, Mareb Governor Naji Bin Ali Al Zaidi and Sheikh M'Fareh Mohammed Buhaibeh, a respected Mareb tribal leader and tribal negotiator, lauded the youth council's aims and encouraged the young women and men as they embarked on the new initiative.

The council's July meetings featured training in strategic planning, fundraising and local resource development, conflict resolution and mitigation strategies, and leadership and team building.

NDI has focused on encouraging youth to work together across gender and tribal divides; build and strengthen the relationship between the youth council and the elected local council; create a conducive environment for regular interaction between youth, tribal leaders and the government; and promote discussion of conflicts facing Juba District.

In just three weeks following its launch, the Juba District Cross-Tribal Youth Council raised \$745 in local funds to support its work and established a financial committee, chaired by a female member, a media committee and a legal committee.

In turn, the Al Juba Local Council committed space in its building for the council, invited council representatives to serve as honorary members of the local council and is finalizing a strategy to engage youth on community development issues.

NDI will continue to support the Al Juba council, working to develop members' skills to educate students on conflict, serve as mediators and become advocates for community development initiatives. NDI will also provide guidance and assistance for efforts to form a similar council in Ain District in the neighboring Shabwa governorate.



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Since 2005, with support from the United States Agency for International Development, NDI has worked with tribal leaders and nongovernmental organizations in the governorates of Ma-reb, Al-Jawf and Shabwa to end conflict in their regions.