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DT Institute

Case Study: Peace from Within

How the Reconciliation Committee in Taiz Transformed Conflict
into Bridges of Trust

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OVERVIEW

In the war-torn and divided city of Taiz, exhausted by conflict since 2015, law enforcement institutions have been experiencing an unprecedented level of weakness and institutional fragmentation. The consequences of the conflict have not been limited to physical destruction; they have also undermined the administrative and organizational foundations of the security and judicial sectors, leading to the collapse of the formal justice system in many parts of the city. This fragility is attributed to the multiplicity of power centers, competing authorities, the absence of operational budgets, and the deterioration of human resources, factors that have collectively weakened the ability of official institutions to protect citizens, enforce the law, and resolve disputes.

The siege imposed on the city further deepened the crisis, restricting the movement of people and goods and cutting off essential supplies, including the funding required to operate public institutions. With the ongoing political and administrative division between rival authorities, security and judicial bodies have been operating under divergent loyalties, stripping them of neutrality and credibility in the eyes of the public. As a result, local disputes over land and property escalated sharply, and the need arose for alternative community mechanisms capable of maintaining civil peace and resolving conflicts.

In this institutional vacuum, community committees emerged as a natural local response to the absence of the state and the growing gaps in the justice system. These committees are composed of respected local figures, community leaders, and notables who enjoy broad social acceptance and serve as mediators and peacemakers among disputing parties. Their approach is rooted in values of social solidarity and the Yemeni tribal cultural heritage, which grants arbitration and reconciliation a central role as traditional means of restoring social balance and resolving disputes.

In Yemeni culture generally, and in Taiz in particular, tribal arbitration and social custom constitute a deeply embedded social system based on principles of justice, dignity, restitution of rights, and the preservation of social relations. This historical culture has contributed significantly to the effectiveness of community committees, as people see in them an extension of familiar practices characterized by flexibility, quick response, and locally accepted solutions, free from the complexities of the formal judiciary.

Although the need for such mechanisms exists throughout the city, it is far more pressing in the rural areas of Taiz, which make up roughly 70% of the governorate's population. Official and international data indicate that more than half of Yemen's population lives in rural areas, while other estimates (World Bank and national statistical summaries) place this percentage between 60% and 71%. These figures reflect the scale of the needs and the institutional vacuum in these regions.

The weakness of law enforcement institutions in rural areas appears in several practical forms; the absence or extreme scarcity of security and judicial facilities, many districts lack functioning police stations or courts, making access to formal justice both costly and difficult, and increasing reliance on local arbitration, the decline in operational capacity of security and judicial bodies due to lack of funding, fragmented staffing, and conflicting loyalties, which limits their ability to respond to rural cases or enforce the law, security barriers and blockade conditions, where checkpoints and restricted roads hinder the movement of security personnel and judges, leading to case backlogs and widening legal protection gaps between urban and rural populations.

This institutional weakness has fueled greater dependence on customary and tribal mediation to resolve disputes over land and property, contributing to acts of retaliation, the spread of weapons, and the erosion of trust in official institutions, all of which deepen social divisions and complicate future state-building efforts. Against this backdrop, rural community committees have become vital mechanisms, close to the people, able to intervene quickly to prevent conflict escalation, and rooted in social acceptance and local culture. These committees can also serve as bridges between communities and formal institutions through structured referral and documentation protocols, functioning as complementary partners in restoring the rule of law rather than substitutes for it.

Within this context, the Community Consensus and Reconciliation Committee in Taiz stands out as a distinguished model of such local initiatives. It aims to redefine justice beyond the courtroom, shaping a form of justice driven first by collective conscience rather than legal texts. Established in January 2025 under the SPARK project, implemented by DT Institute in partnership with the Abductees' Mothers Association and SAM for Rights and Liberties, the Committee now represents a practical example of how peace can begin from within the community itself, not imposed from the outside.

BUILDING TRUST FROM THE GROUND UP

The Committee was formed through a carefully designed structure consisting of ten members from diverse backgrounds, including judges, researchers, women, and representatives of marginalized groups, to ensure inclusive representation and a balanced vision.

Members were selected according to a geographic distribution that covers four main districts in Taiz (Maqbanah, As-Shamayatin, Al-Ma'afer, and Al-Mudhaffar), enabling the Committee to genuinely reflect the pulse of the community rather than any single entity.

"The goal of this diversity is to create a committee that mirrors society in all its components, and speaks in one voice despite its differences," **Essam Al-Sabri, Project Director, comments.**

WORKING METHODOLOGY AND INTERVENTION MECHANISM

The Committee operates through a multi-layered approach that combines Community mediation via local teams representing all targeted districts (Maqbanah, Al-Ma'afer, Al-Mudhaffar, As-Shamayatin, Salah, etc.); Legal and human rights documentation, including monitoring cases and recording violations according to transitional justice standards; Advocacy and awareness, through community awareness sessions and workshops promoting reconciliation and transitional justice culture; as well as Partnerships and coordination, through institutional cooperation with civil society organizations, local authorities, and governmental bodies.

THE FIELD SPEAKS

From day one, the Committee chose to begin in the field rather than from offices. Its teams moved into tension-prone areas, gathered data, documented violations, and gradually gained the trust of people who had lost confidence in all official authorities.

"People need someone who listens to them first, not someone who judges them. Restorative justice is about rebuilding bridges before issuing decisions," **Abdullah Jassar, Committee Chair**

From the start of the Committee's work until the end of October 2025, the SPARK team documented 96 cases, the vast majority directly or indirectly linked to the war. Of these, 26 cases were resolved, while 70 remain open and are currently being processed. Committee reporting indicates a noticeable increase in newly registered cases over the past 30 days. During May and June 2025, the Committee faced several challenging field cases; the killing of Mohammad Tareq; the case of a marginalized citizen in Souq Al-Sabt; and the Al-Alquma water dispute. The Committee succeeded in activating these cases and calming tensions between conflicting families in cooperation with local mediators such as Ali Mohammed Al-Haddad from Buthayjah area.

One of the notable resolved cases involved a land dispute in Habil Salman, where the Committee intervened to stop a dangerous escalation, affirm property ownership for Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Mujahid, secure acknowledgment from the aggressing party, and ensure fair compensation for tenants, leading to an official closure of the case at the police level. A second case involved a family dispute over a house, a passageway, and mountain land in Mishra'ah and Hadnan. The Committee's team gathered data, conducted site visits, held a joint meeting, and facilitated an individualized reconciliation under its supervision, successfully ending the conflict and restoring stability. Another example of the Committee's success was a practical agreement to relocate a waste bin and prevent the dumping of trash between two neighborhoods after a service-related dispute in Al-Murour Roundabout, resolving the tension swiftly. In June, the Committee expanded its efforts to include cases with humanitarian dimensions, such as securing the release of a child detained in the juvenile facility and addressing major property disputes in Salah district. These interventions led community members to describe it as: "The Committee of Humanitarian Justice."

KEY TURNING POINTS

In August 2025, the Committee faced a true test when severe flooding struck Salah District.

Instead of halting their work, members mobilized immediately to the field to document the damage and support affected families. They demonstrated that reconciliation is not only between people, but also between communities and their environment. Their swift actions earned the Committee formal recognition as an accredited body for needs assessment in Salah District, further strengthening community trust. The team conducted on-site assessments, documented the damage, and produced a comprehensive report detailing floodwater entering homes, destruction of food supplies and shelters, collapsed walls, loss of livestock, damaged vehicles, and blocked roads.

The Committee then coordinated with local authorities and relevant organizations, including the District Director and the Director of Public Works and Roads, prompting an immediate response that included clearing flood channels and mitigating risks for affected families.

Local and international organizations also intervened, distributing emergency kits that included mattresses, blankets, kitchen utensils, food baskets, and cash assistance of 272,000 Yemeni riyals.

"Without the intervention of the Committee and its member Kamal Al-Shar'abi, our voices would not have reached the authorities, and the losses could have been much greater," a beneficiary in Salah District said.

The Committee also succeeded in making breakthroughs in highly complex cases, such as:

- A longstanding land dispute in Mokha, where a deeply rooted property conflict, spanning over 400 years and old inheritance divisions dating back 85 years, had escalated between a resident and his brothers. Conflicting ownership narratives and the antiquity of the documents intensified tensions and risked serious escalation. At the same time, a second sensitive case emerged involving another community member, related to burial rights and a proposed compensation (blood money) of 15 million riyals. A member of the Committee led a series of meetings bringing all

parties together with local notables. The Committee conducted systematic reviews of historical documents, conducted three field visits to Al-Turba and Al-Markaz, one field visit to Mokha, maintained daily communication channels to narrow gaps, and coordinated with the district director and influential mediators involved in the Shukayr case.

- The main land dispute was resolved by affirming the rightful owner's claim and closing all avenues of conflict. Significant progress was achieved in the Shukayr case through an agreement on burial arrangements and gradual steps toward collecting compensation, reducing the likelihood of confrontation, and restoring local stability.
- The Case of a Child in Al-Qabbaytah: A 13-year-old boy from a marginalized background, with special needs, displaced from Al-Ma'afer/Al-Bireen, disappeared for three months before it was revealed that he had been detained at the Juvenile Care Center on suspicion of stealing clothes from a street stall in Bir Basha. The child's vulnerable family structure and the legal procedures unfolding without proper safeguards left him exposed. Upon identifying the case, a Committee lawyer, in coordination with SAM Organization, intervened and contacted Judge Ms. Nadia Al-Alimi, Deputy Prosecutor for Juvenile Affairs, and Judge Ms. Safa'a Al-Adeimi, Head of the Juvenile Court, to initiate a restorative path. A session was held at SAM's office with Committee Chair Abdullah Jassar and the stall owner. The meeting concluded with a written reconciliation and repayment of the value of the clothes, 200,000 riyals, covered by SAM. A ruling was then issued for "time served," and the child was released.

By restoring the child's freedom and preventing a potential criminal record, this case stands as a model of restorative justice that considers the vulnerability of displaced and marginalized children and highlights the vital role of community-based legal mediation in protecting the most vulnerable.

FROM CONFLICT TO UNDERSTANDING: HOW THE COMMITTEE MANAGED DISPUTES AND IMPROVED RESOURCE ACCESS"

In September 2025, the Community Consensus and Reconciliation Committee emerged as one of the most active field teams within the SPARK project, after addressing a diverse set of sensitive cases involving water disputes, community conflicts, and humanitarian response across several areas of Taiz governorate. The Committee's interventions reflected a strong sense of initiative and responsibility amid tense local conditions and limited public services.

Throughout the month, challenges multiplied, from disputes over water resources in Salah District, to social tensions triggered by individual incidents such as the vehicular ramming of a young girl in Al-Qabbaytah, in addition to complaints from displaced families in Al-Ma'afer whose tents had been damaged by heavy rainfall. These issues were exacerbated by poor coordination among authorities and the limited capacity of local institutions to respond quickly, increasing the need for a trusted community mediator capable of containing crises before they escalated.

THE COMMITTEE ADOPTED A MULTI-PRONGED APPROACH:

- In Salah District, the Committee played an active role in the workshop "Social Cohesion and Water Conflict Resolution," organized in collaboration with the Youth Creativity Organization. During the workshop, the Committee received 20 community dispute cases related to water sources. Committee Chair Abdullah Jassar and member Kamal Al-Shar'abi led technical and community-level discussions with water authorities, public works officials, and local sheikhs. The meeting resulted in the formation of local mediation teams and strengthened coordination with service institutions.

A tribal elder commented during the session:

"The presence of the Consensus Committee restored trust between people and official authorities, because they are the community's voice – one that speaks with awareness and responsibility."

- In Al-Qubaytah (Lahj), under the leadership of Abdullah Jassar, the Committee successfully resolved a violent conflict following an accident in which a young girl was killed. The Committee brought together the families of both the victim and the driver in a public reconciliation session that concluded with a gracious pardon and an official settlement, preventing a potentially widespread tribal rift.

- In Al-Ma'afer, committee member Saif Al-Awaji conducted a field follow-up on the needs of displaced families affected by flooding, preparing a documented report for the Executive Unit to trigger an urgent intervention. He also recommended establishing an agricultural association to monitor the impact of the floods and assess damages.
- In Salah, once again, the Committee resolved a decades-old dispute over the western Haraziyah road, a conflict that had lasted more than thirty years. The team facilitated the removal of an old structure that had blocked the road, finally reopening access for ambulances and food deliveries.
- The Community Consensus and Reconciliation Committee has repeatedly proven that it is far more than a dispute mediator; it is a vital bridge between the state and society, capable of transforming conflict into an opportunity for reconciliation and serving as a practical model of restorative justice in an environment marked by fragmentation. This experience affirmed that, "When dialogue is guided by the conscience of the community, it becomes stronger than any disagreement," as expressed by one elder from the Haraziyah area after the historic reopening of the road.

CHALLENGES ARE NOT AN OBSTACLE

Despite limited financial and logistical resources, the Community Consensus and Reconciliation Committee succeeded over the past four months in implementing 13 field and awareness activities in areas with complex social and security conditions, such as Salah, Al-Mudhaffar, Al-Ma'afer, and Maqbana. Although the available resources were insufficient to cover all regions, the Committee managed to extend its mediation efforts beyond its geographic mandate to districts such as Al-Qabbaytah in Lahj Governorate, where it resolved a violent dispute through reconciliation and pardon.

The Committee relied on its wide network of relationships with local authorities, human rights organizations, and mosque preachers to overcome obstacles—demonstrating that community-driven work founded on deep belief in the cause and ethical commitment can generate impact that exceeds available capacities. This experience shows that the Committee has become an effective model of civil mediation and local peacebuilding in Taiz, combining field presence with a solid understanding of human rights principles despite all constraints.

IMPACT OF THE COMMITTEE

From June to September, the Committee worked to entrench a culture of restorative justice and community peace through extensive awareness campaigns targeting diverse social groups. The Committee conducted nine awareness sessions and four training workshops in Al-Mudhaffar, Salah, Al-Ma'afer, and AsAs-Sh-Shammayateen districts, reaching a total of 438 beneficiaries, 260 men and 178 women, representing displaced persons, marginalized groups, university youth, and mosque preachers. The Committee's efforts also included Friday awareness sermons delivered in coordination with the Office of Endowments. Preachers in the Ansar, Al-Mudhaffar, and Himyar mosques delivered sermons focusing on principles of tolerance, transitional justice, and victim redress. These activities helped raise awareness of human rights and peaceful dispute-resolution mechanisms, while strengthening public confidence in the Committee as a trusted community body capable of bridging differences.

LOOTED HOMES AND THE RESTORATION OF RIGHTS

Among the most painful phenomena that have deeply affected the social fabric of Taiz is the widespread seizure and looting of homes and property during years of war and displacement. These cases represent a complex legal and human rights challenge, as homeowners are often absent, have lost their documents, or are unable to reclaim their rights on their own.

In a widely covered media announcement, SAM for Rights and Liberties and the Abductees Mothers Association, under the SPARK program supported by DT Institute, launched the "Return of Looted Homes" initiative in Taiz. The initiative called for restoring several looted homes to their rightful owners as part of broader efforts to advance local peace. The organizations explained that the initiative aims not only to return rights but to repair the social fabric and rebuild trust among neighbors and the wider community. Yemen Future

From June to the end of September 2025, the Community Consensus and Reconciliation Committee gave particular attention to the looted-homes file, considered one of the most urgent transitional-justice issues in Taiz. During this period, the Committee received 27 new complaints involving looted or occupied homes in Al-Mudhaffar, Salah, and Al-Qahirah districts. Through its mediation with official and military authorities, the Committee succeeded in recovering seven homes and restoring them to their owners legally and humanely. The remaining 20 cases are still under follow-up through negotiation channels.

The Committee's approach relied on direct dialogue, full documentation of each case in the Committee's registry, and sending official memoranda to the governor and district directors. Some cases were assigned to members specialized in legal affairs to ensure solutions consistent with local laws and property-rights norms.

One beneficiary expressed relief, saying:

"They returned my house after four years of suffering. I never imagined that a community committee could achieve such an outcome."

WITHIN THIS RESTORATIVE-JUSTICE EFFORT, THE CONSENSUS AND RECONCILIATION COMMITTEE PLAYED AN INTEGRATED AND PIVOTAL ROLE:

- First: The Committee worked with SAM and the Abductees Mothers Association to document cases of looting and property seizure, verify legal ownership, and identify homes not yet returned to their owners.
- Second: It acted as a mediator between rights owners and those occupying the homes, conducting field-based dialogue sessions that sought mutual understandings, fair settlements, and rights restoration without direct confrontation.
- Third: It carried out community and media awareness efforts on the issue of looted homes, using its platforms and relationships with local journalists to publish victims' stories and mobilize public opinion in support of restoring rights, helping to break the silence around this sensitive file.
- Finally: After SAM formally delivered seven homes to their owners, the Committee continued its support by monitoring the stability of the beneficiaries and providing necessary administrative and legal assistance in case they faced pressure or objections from influential local actors.

From this perspective, the Committee did not limit itself to acting as a mediator or observer; it became an active contributor, complementing rights-restoration efforts, bringing together legal, humanitarian, and media dimensions. This broader role reinforced the credibility of the initiative and affirmed that restorative justice is not limited to symbolic gestures; it is about restoring dignity and property to people who suffered displacement and dispossession.

GROWING PARTNERSHIPS AND CREDIBILITY

The Community Consensus and Reconciliation Committee has worked to expand its institutional and community partnerships to strengthen its credibility and impact. On one hand, the Committee solidified its cooperation with local authorities in the districts of Al-Mudhaffar, Al-Ma'afer, and As-Shammayateen, as well as with civil society organizations such as Youth Without Borders, to exchange legal data and coordinate efforts on cases involving violations and civil rights. On the other hand, the Committee engaged in notable documentation initiatives such as "The Memory Museum" and the "Siege Pathways Initiative." The first focuses on documenting human rights violations and crimes committed against civilians in Taiz by displaying photographs and firsthand testimonies of victims. The second documents the ongoing impacts of the siege on the city's residents and monitors the suffering of besieged neighborhoods to strengthen community accountability.

Through the active participation of Committee members in organizing these events and presenting victims' stories to visitors, the Committee succeeded in bridging human-rights documentation with community reconciliation. This strengthened its presence as a trusted civil umbrella recognized by both citizens and official bodies as a neutral guarantor and mediator before resorting to the courts. This integration between human rights work, awareness efforts, and community engagement marked a qualitative shift in the Committee's performance, establishing it as a model for institutionalizing local efforts in restorative justice and building Taiz's collective memory. Such coordination granted the Committee rare credibility among citizens and authorities, who now regard it as a trusted guarantor and social mediator before legal action is pursued.

LESSONS LEARNED AND A FUTURE VISION

Between June and September 2025, the Community Consensus and Reconciliation Committee accumulated a rich field experience demonstrating that well-organized civil action can create a tangible impact in a complex environment like Taiz. One of the key lessons learned is that effective coordination between local authorities and civil society is essential for any initiative related to restorative justice. Community trust is not earned through statements but through action: through consistent presence and swift responses to people's grievances.

The experience also showed that involving religious and community leaders in reconciliation and awareness efforts multiplies the impact of the messages and reinforces shared human values. Looking forward, the Committee aims to expand its institutional work by building a network of local committees across the districts and strengthening members' capacities in legal mediation, rights documentation, and community communication. It also seeks to launch a digital platform to document cases and achievements, facilitate communication with partners and organizations, and enhance transparency and follow-up.

In a heartfelt reflection on this phase, one senior member stated:

"We may not have great resources, but we have something that cannot be bought... our belief that peace begins with a sincere word spoken at the right moment."

This deeply rooted conviction is what enabled the Committee to move steadily forward, transforming its initiatives from limited efforts into a comprehensive community pathway for building peace and justice in Taiz.

TAIZ RECONCILES WITH ITSELF

At the time of preparing this case study, the Community Consensus and Reconciliation Committee continues to play its vital role in Taiz, standing as a pioneering national model in advancing transitional-justice principles and community-based peacebuilding grounded in fairness and social accountability. Throughout 2025, the Committee demonstrated that peace does not begin with major political agreements but with small community initiatives that give people a sense of justice and dignity.

Through its humanitarian, rights-based, and mediation work, the Committee has succeeded in transforming individual conflicts into opportunities for social rapprochement and redefining justice in ways that reflect the daily realities of citizens. The experience has shown that when the community itself owns the reconciliation process, it becomes the true guarantor of sustainable peace. Transitional justice, therefore, is not merely a legal process; it is a social journey toward healing and rebuilding trust. As one Committee member put it: "True peace cannot be imposed from above; it is built in the hearts of people when they feel that justice belongs to them, not to others."

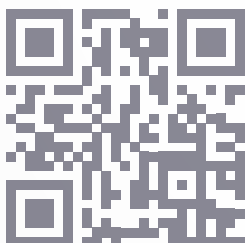
With this profound understanding, the Committee continues to serve as a bridge between pain and hope, between division and unity, affirming that reconciliation is not simply the resolution of disputes, but the establishment of a justice owned by the community and safeguarded by its collective conscience.

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