

POLICY PAPER

From Conflict to Recovery: Resolving Tensions in Al-Sarari Village, Working
Along a Roadmap to Expand Restorative Justice and Community-Led
Peacebuilding





رابطة أمهات المختطفين
Abductees' Mothers
Association

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Restorative Justice and Community-Led
Peacebuilding

Prepared by:
Abdulghani Al-Hiagem
Researcher in Peacebuilding
and Human Rights

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ABDUCTEES OF MOTHERS ASSOCIATION



The Association of Mothers of Abductees is a women-led human rights organization founded in April 2016. It was formed by human rights defenders, mothers, and wives of detainees. The Association works to monitor and document cases of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance and report them to the relevant authorities. It aims to build a human rights memory that preserves victims' rights to accountability and redress in the post-war period. The Association also works to amplify the voices of victims in national and international forums and maintains ongoing communication with decision-makers and local mediators to secure the release of detainees. Additionally, it provides psychosocial support to survivors and their families.

SAM FOR RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES



SAM is an independent, non-profit Yemeni human rights organization that began its activities in January 2016 and obtained a work license in December 2017. The organization seeks to monitor and document human rights violations in Yemen and work to stop these violations through advocacy efforts in partnership with local and international organizations. It aims to raise human rights awareness through community-based rights development and strives to hold human rights violators accountable in Yemen in cooperation with international mechanisms and human rights organizations.

JUSTICE FOR YEMEN PACT COALITION (J4YP)



The Yemen Justice Charter is a coalition of human rights organizations and civil society actors united to promote and protect human rights in Yemen. The coalition's mission is to advocate for the rights of the

Yemeni people, especially vulnerable and marginalized groups. The coalition is committed to addressing the systematic human rights violations that Yemen has endured over years of conflict and violence. This charter seeks to empower the Yemeni people to demand their rights, raise awareness about violations, and advocate for justice and accountability at local, national, and international levels. The charter is guided by the principles of respect for human dignity, equality, justice, and non-discrimination. The coalition believes that through cooperation, its members can help end impunity, provide essential support and compensation for victims, and contribute to a more peaceful, just, and prosperous future for Yemen.



DT Institute

 **DT Institute**

A non-profit organization committed to the principle of “development differently.” The Institute implements complex global development programs in conflict-affected, fragile, and closed environments and funds leading think tanks that stimulate innovation and improve people’s lives through evidence- based programs. The Institute works in partnership with communities and leaders to build more resilient, just, equitable, inclusive, and democratic societies, and to ensure their sustainability.

Support for Peace in Yemen through Accountability, Reconciliation, and Knowledge Exchange (SPARK)

This paper was written and published as part of the Support for Peace in Yemen through Accountability, Reconciliation, and Knowledge Exchange (SPARK) program – a scientific and practical framework that seeks to translate the concepts of transitional justice from theory into community practice.

The program focuses on enhancing awareness and strengthening local capacities to activate mechanisms of restorative justice, accountability, and reparations, as essential pathways toward a sustainable peace grounded in truth, fairness, and inclusive participation. It is founded on the principle that justice is not merely a legal process, but also a social and cultural endeavor that contributes to healing the national fabric, rebuilding trust, and restoring collective memory on the basis of acknowledgment and reconciliation.

The program works in close coordination with the Justice for Yemen Partnership (J4YP) – a coalition of ten Yemeni civil society organizations advocating for justice, accountability, and peacebuilding for victims of human rights violations across Yemen. Within this framework, SPARK partners and members of the coalition engage local communities and political actors in initiatives on reconciliation and restorative justice, aiming to enhance their capacity to participate effectively in transitional justice processes.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy paper presents a comprehensive structural analysis of the complex conflict in the village of Al-Sarari in Taiz governorate, treating it as a micro-case for understanding the mechanisms through which local civil conflicts are transformed into devastating proxy wars within the broader context of the nationwide Yemeni conflict. The paper begins by defining the core problem: the village's strategic location, coupled with its demographic composition, enabled the instrumentalization and militarization of latent historical sectarian and tribal divisions in the context of the post-2015 war. The paper aims to provide an integrated analysis of the roots and dynamics of the conflict, culminating in a practical roadmap for peace.

The paper adopts a qualitative research methodology, relying primarily on primary sources in light of the scarcity of previous studies. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with key actors, one focus group discussion, and two community dialogue sessions. The Actors, Content, Context, Process Conflict Analysis Framework (ACCP) was used to deconstruct the components of the conflict with strict adherence to ethical considerations and to the “do no harm” principle.

The analysis first reviews the broader context, explaining how the geographical location (control over the environs of Taiz) and the demographic identity (which contains traditional Zaydi character) made the village a strategic target. It shows how the national war acted as the trigger that transformed local disputes into full-scale confrontation, particularly as the Houthi movement exploited sectarian affiliations to turn the village into a military base, taking advantage of the vacuum created by the collapse of state institutions.

The analysis then turns to the dimensions of the conflict, describing it as a multi-layered conflict in which horizontal (sectarian) cleavages intersect with vertical (political and military) ones. The paper sets out the chronological sequence of events, from the phase of contained disputes (pre-2011), through the phase of ideological polarization (2011–2014), to the phase of open militarization after 2015, which culminated in a full-scale military confrontation in August 2016 following the cutting of a vital road.

The paper then examines previous containment attempts and explains why tribal and community mediation efforts failed. Chief among these reasons are: absence of an effective role for state institutions; subordination of local components to the agendas of the warring parties; lack of trust; and the fact that the scale of harm exceeded the capacity of customary norms.

This is followed by an in-depth analysis of the actors and power dynamics. The paper unpacks the complex network of actors (direct, indirect, local notables, external powers, youth, and women) and identifies their conflicting interests, which have impeded peaceful solutions.

The paper provides an analysis of multi-level causes. First are the root causes, encapsulated in the “deadly triangle” (the state’s historical weakness, sectarian and social divisions, and longstanding disputes over resources such as water and land). Second are the objective factors that exacerbated fragility (the strategic location and the collapse of state institutions). Third are the driving factors that acted as triggers (political polarization, sectarian mobilization, and failed mediation efforts). Fourth are the immediate causes that ignited the confrontation (cutting the main road, turning the village into a military base, and provocative sectarian activities).

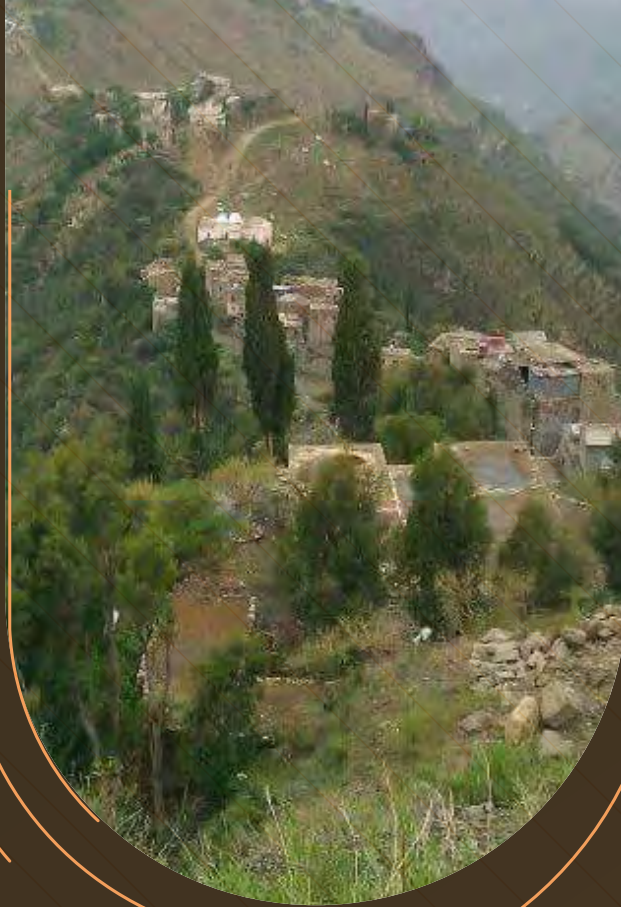
The paper documents the devastating impacts of the conflict, which have not been limited to severe material losses (the killing of 46 people, injury of 50 others, displacement of more than 150 families, complete destruction of 142 houses, and partial destruction of 95 others). These violations have torn apart the social fabric, led to the collapse of the system of values and customary norms, destroyed basic services (health and education), and generated deep psychological trauma. On the basis of these impacts, the paper identifies the community's graduated needs, ranging from survival necessities (security, immediate justice, and services) to the requirements for sustainable peace (psychosocial support and development).

The paper reviews the challenges that impede restorative justice, which constitute an integrated set of political and institutional challenges (the collapse of state authority and impunity), security-related challenges (the proliferation of arms and land disputes), social challenges (entrenched grievances and weak trust), and economic challenges (the collapse of livelihoods and the complexity of reparations), in addition to the challenges posed by the existing legal frameworks.

In contrast, the paper identifies opportunities for rebuilding trust, which lie in societal fatigue with the conflict, the widespread preference for reconciliation, the presence of shared interests (the need for services), and the existence of local peace actors.

Building on this integrated analysis, the paper proposes a roadmap and a comprehensive theory of change based on “empowering local actors to lead a restorative justice process, supported by service-delivery and development interventions.” The proposed solutions are presented along three concurrent tracks: short-term (building trust and meeting urgent needs), medium-term (recovery and rebuilding social bonds), and long-term (sustainable development and ensuring non-recurrence of conflict through strategic projects and strengthened local governance).

The paper underscores the possibility of applying this model in similar contexts by adapting the analytical and operational framework, rather than as a “ready-made recipe.” It concludes with practical recommendations directed to the government, local authorities, international donor organizations, civil society, and community leaders, with the aim of creating an enabling environment that will ensure the transformation of Al-Sarari from a “flashpoint of tension” into an inspiring and sustainable “model of recovery.”



INTRODUCTION

The Yemeni conflict is often reduced to its geopolitical dimensions or to a national struggle among major actors. Yet this broad perspective overlooks a fundamental truth: the civil war is, in fact, a destructive aggregation of thousands of complex local conflicts, where historical grievances intersect with ideological and sectarian divides and community loyalties — ultimately weaponized as fuel for broader war strategies.

In this context, the village of Al-Sarari, located in the strategic interior of Taiz governorate, is not merely another case study; it is a magnifying lens that painfully illuminates the mechanisms of this destructive transformation. It offers a vivid example of how a once cohesive community can be dismantled and how identity factors and geographic location can shift from local characteristics into deadly frontlines exploited by national conflict actors.

This paper, prepared within the framework of the Supporting Peace in Yemen Through Accountability, Reconciliation, and Knowledge-Sharing (SPARK) project, presents a central problem that goes beyond merely diagnosing causal factors. The problem lies not only in the outbreak of violence, but in the dual failure revealed by this conflict: first, the profound weakness of formal state institutions in managing disputes and protecting citizens; and second, the tragic inability of traditional community and tribal mechanisms to contain a conflict that was weaponized and ideologized beyond their absorptive capacity.

This dual vacuum has left the community in a post-traumatic state, where grievances related to land, economic devastation, and deep social wounds have become integral to daily humanitarian needs. Here lies the greatest challenge facing any future peacebuilding efforts: how can trust be restored in an environment dominated by force and impunity?

Moving away from macro-level political analysis, this paper is grounded in a core premise: sustainable peace in contexts like Al-Sarari cannot be imposed from the top down; it must be built from the bottom up. Rather than offering “ready-made formulas,” the paper draws – through direct engagement with the local community – on a deeper understanding of the dynamics of collapse.

The goal of this study is not merely to document a tragedy, but to offer a practical contribution based on the conviction that the true entry point for peace does not begin with political solutions, but with community-led restorative justice. It provides an operational framework showing how service-delivery and development interventions can serve as leverage to initiate community dialogue around root grievances. The ultimate aim is not only to save the village but to present an adaptable and applicable analytical and procedural model that equips policymakers, donors, and local actors with a realistic roadmap for transforming similar flashpoints into models of sustainable recovery.



METHODOLOGY

This paper relies on a qualitative research methodology designed to achieve a deep and comprehensive understanding of the complexities of the conflict in Al-Sarari from the perspective of those directly affected by it. Given the scarcity of prior studies and official reports that examine this conflict in detail, the paper is grounded primarily in data collected from primary sources to ensure analytical accuracy and contextual relevance. Field data was collected through a set of integrated tools, including:

- **In-depth interviews:** A series of semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with key actors, including local notables and community leaders, representatives of the conflicting parties, direct victims, local youth, and female activists. These interviews aimed to understand motivations, interests, and individual perceptions of the conflict and possible solutions.
- **Focus group discussion:** A focused discussion session was held with a group comprising women, youth, and a diverse set of individuals representing various segments affected by the conflict – including notables and social influencers – to explore collective perceptions regarding the causes and impacts of the conflict, coexistence challenges, and recovery priorities.
- **Community dialogue sessions:** Two extended dialogue sessions were organized, bringing together participants with the capacity to influence their communities and contribute to the peace process, including:
 - **Social and political notables,** given their pivotal role in mediation, shaping public opinion, resolving customary disputes, ensuring political commitment to proposed solutions, and providing necessary support.
 - **Representatives of youth and women** to ensure the inclusion of all social segments and their engagement in the peace process.
- Experts and facilitators to provide technical support and facilitate dialogue toward generating a shared vision of proposed solutions.

The paper employs the ACCP as its analytical framework, breaking the conflict down into its main components: context, actors (including their interests and sources of power), causes (root, structural, driving, and immediate), and dynamics. The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the key patterns and themes emerging from interviews and dialogues.

The scope of this paper is limited to the Al-Sarari area and its immediately adjacent villages, while recognizing that the dynamics of the conflict are influenced by factors at the governorate and national levels. The research faced methodological limitations, including security challenges that restricted access to certain areas and high sensitivity of the subject, which required the gradual building of trust with participants. The study adhered to the highest ethical standards, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and safety of their identities, and applying the “do no harm” principle throughout all stages of the research.



GENERAL CONTEXT

The village of Al-Sarari, located within the district of Saber al-Mawadim in Taiz governorate, represents a vivid and complex model of conflict dynamics in Yemen, where local factors related to geography and identity intersect with the broader context of the national war

The village of Al-Sarari, located within the district of Saber al-Mawadim in Taiz governorate, represents a vivid and complex model of conflict dynamics in Yemen, where local factors related to geography and identity intersect with the broader context of the national war. The village holds exceptional strategic significance due to its position on the slopes of Jabal Saber – one of Yemen’s highest mountains. Its elevation (743 meters at the village level and more than 3,000 meters at the mountain peak) transformed Al-Sarari into an indispensable anchor point for military control over the areas surrounding the city of Taiz, making it a constant strategic target for warring national-level factions.

Demographically, Al-Sarari is characterized by a traditionally religious social composition with strong Zaydi loyalties. It includes the Al-Junaid family and is marked by dense kinship networks and deeply interwoven village and clan ties. This distinctive identity made the village a social and cultural hub for surrounding areas, yet it also placed it in natural opposition to hardline religious ideologies (Salafism). Local sources emphasize that the village historically resisted what they describe as “Wahhabi takfiri” ideas. This long-standing sectarian divergence served as latent fuel waiting to ignite under the pressures of civil war.

The post-2015 nationwide civil war was not merely a backdrop to the conflict in Al-Sarari – it was the primary catalyst that transformed old local disputes into a full-scale military confrontation. The broader war acted as both an enabler and a legitimizing framework for local conflict, as national polarization fragmented the area’s social fabric. Although Taiz governorate appears superficially divided between internationally recognized government forces and the Houthi movement, the reality is far more intricate, with multiple armed factions sharing control. This fragmentation directly shaped local dynamics in Al-Sarari, where community loyalties evolved into alliances with national and even international actors.

The national war fundamentally reshaped local dynamics. Politicization and militarization of the community were the first steps in this transformation. The Houthi movement exploited the sectarian affiliations of the village’s residents – particularly the Al-Junaid family – turning Al-Sarari into a “local base,” training individuals and stockpiling medium and heavy weapons. This shift transformed the village from a local community into an integral component of a wider military strategy, granting it a newfound strategic importance.

This militarization provoked concern among neighboring villages and popular resistance forces, which viewed the village as a strategic threat to Jabal Al-Arous. Ultimately, this led to the decision to “liberate” the area. This sequence of events illustrates those local dynamics

— such as inter-village disputes — were not on their own sufficient to ignite a full-scale war. They required reinforcement from national dynamics, such as militarization and political alliances, to escalate to this level of violence.

Amid this collapse, the absence of strong state institutions created a significant vacuum in formal conflict-resolution mechanisms, enabling armed groups to assert their authority and exploit the situation. These groups emerged as “primary actors” in the community, capitalizing on poverty and unemployment to recruit fighters and provide a source of income for jobless youth. This trajectory demonstrates how chaos and the absence of a central authority empower armed groups while undermining any prospects for peaceful solutions. For this reason, resolving the conflict in Al-Sarari requires more than a ceasefire; it necessitates rebuilding state institutions and creating sustainable economic opportunities to reduce young people’s vulnerability to recruitment and violence.

The conflict environment is heavily shaped by internal factors. Culturally, the traditional Shiite-Zaydi identity of the Al-Junaid family played a decisive role in mobilizing local fighters and provided justification for targeting by opposing sectarian actors. Socially, traditional tribal norms that typically promote reconciliation lost influence in the face of military force. Mediation attempts led by local sheikhs and notables failed, indicating the erosion of customary dispute-resolution systems. Economically, the harsh conditions of war and the siege on Taiz resulted in soaring prices and deteriorating humanitarian conditions. This economic decline fosters a conflict-prone environment, intensifying competition over scarce resources and pushing youth to join armed groups that offer salaries or protection. Forced displacement also caused direct material losses for residents — homes and property — thus increasing the demands for reparations and complicating prospects for return.

The immediate conflict environment in Al-Sarari remains perilous. Although government-aligned forces retook control of the village, it remains vulnerable to shelling from Houthi forces positioned in the al-Hawban area. This fragile security situation hinders community recovery efforts and prolongs displacement. The conflict also failed to produce local solutions. While there were attempts at mediation and reconciliation by community notables, the nature of the grave violations committed (siege, shelling, sectarian targeting) pushed advocates of criminal justice to the forefront, emphasizing that mass atrocities do not lapse with time and that perpetrators must be prosecuted under international law. Reconciling the demands of tribal settlement with the requirements of punitive justice constitutes the most challenging obstacle to ending the conflict.

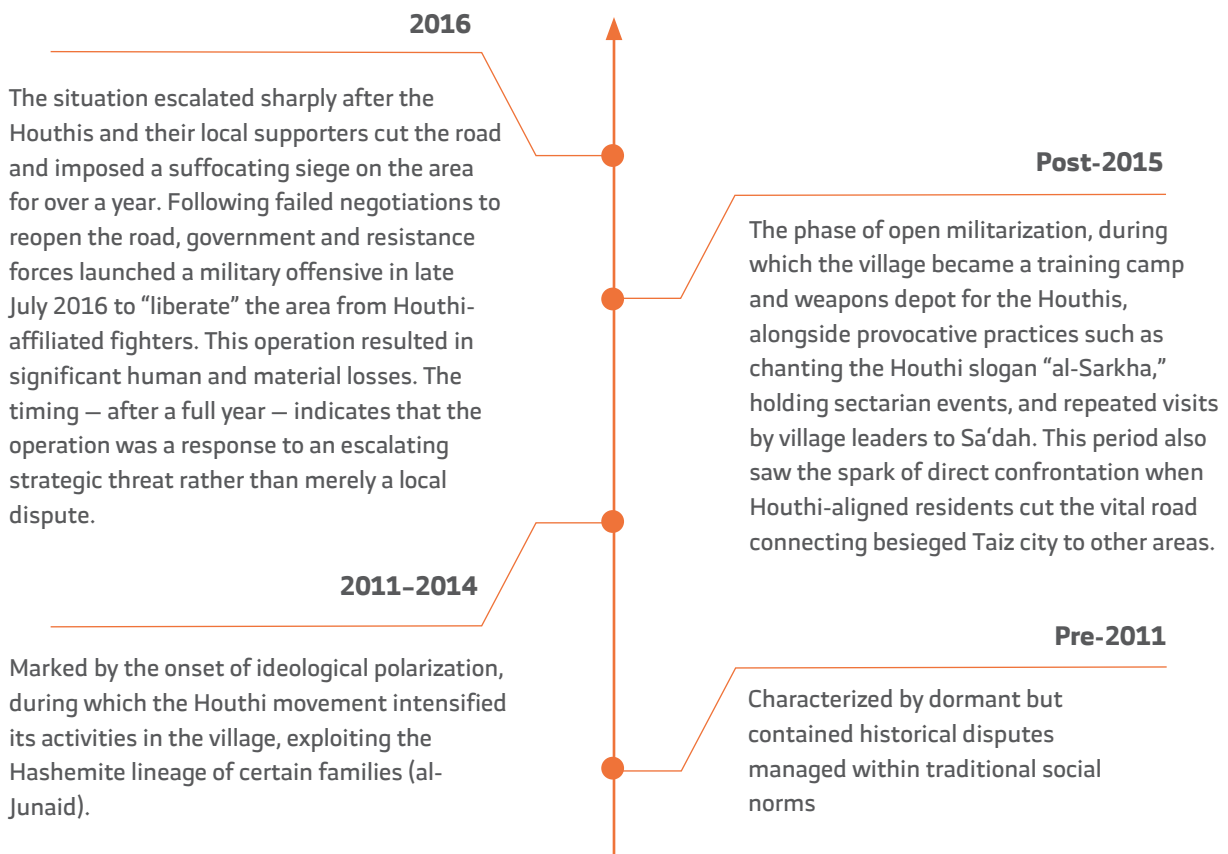


CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND ITS DIMENSIONS

The conflict in Al-Sarari is a multi-layered, compound conflict in which historical, social, and sectarian factors intersect with political and military ones. Horizontal cleavages (sectarian, ethnic, regional) overlap with vertical divisions (political, military, and economic interests). What began as longstanding tribal and familial disputes – dating back more than 150 years and revolving around issues such as social influence, revenge, and control over resources like water – transformed after 2015 into a political-military conflict shaped by the broader national war.

Within this context, the conflict in Al-Sarari evolved into a confrontation between two principal parties: the nationally backed “legitimate” resistance forces, and the Houthis movement along with its ideological and political supporters, particularly the Al-Junaid family. The core issue of the conflict centered on military control over this strategically located village and the elimination of opposing political, military, and sectarian presence. The nature of the conflict was marked by extreme violence, including siege, raids, and full-scale military operations.

The key turning points in the conflict’s timeline may be traced as follows:



The relationship between these parties is one of pure hostility and exclusion, with each side seeking absolute control. The local community is deeply and sharply divided at every level: a geographic divide between the village and its surroundings, a political divide over national allegiances, a social divide among families, and a profound sectarian divide.

Conflict actors have used narratives of “protection,” “purification,” and mobilization under the banners of “defending the religious project” or “repelling sectarian aggression.” Historical

grievances, religious symbols, and local customs were instrumentalized to construct narratives asserting each side's right to dominate the village and exact revenge upon the other. These narratives were amplified by active media coverage that frequently cast each party's position as "sacred" or "absolute," entrenching hate speech and separatist attitudes.

A customary "law" was even enacted, prohibiting the return of anyone who supported the Houthi movement – cementing forced displacement and complicating the prospects for reconciliation. This deep polarization has poisoned daily life, leaving residents in a constant state of sectarian and regional tension and worsening relations day after day.

Despite the complexity of the conflict, the area witnessed limited attempts to contain escalation before it turned into open warfare, as well as later efforts to address grievances. These efforts took the form of tribal and community mediations, including meetings between elders and notables from Al-Sarari and surrounding areas to defuse tensions. While some notables played a relatively positive role, other tribal components contributed to undermining the initiatives and fueling escalation, driven by central political and military interests.

These efforts ultimately failed to produce any tangible solutions, and the situation deteriorated rapidly thereafter. This failure can be explained by overlapping structural and contextual factors, foremost among them the absence of an effective role for state security and judicial institutions, which deprived initiatives of legal and enforcement mechanisms. Some local actors demonstrated clear subordination to the agendas of direct warring parties, turning their conditional support into an obstacle.

The initiatives lacked inclusivity and failed to engage those most affected. They focused on symptoms rather than addressing root causes such as historical grievances and water and land disputes. Amid deep distrust and disregard for the sensitivity of the sectarian context, the scale of harm and the severity of violations exceeded the capacity of traditional norms to absorb. This pushed advocates of criminal accountability to the forefront, insisting that such harms cannot be settled through tribal reconciliation alone, but require an approach that reconciles restorative justice with criminal accountability.

Actors and Power Dynamics:

The failure of previous initiatives to contain the conflict in Al-Sarari cannot be understood without examining the nature of the actors involved, the divergence of their interests, and the imbalance of power among them. These experiences reveal that the absence of consensus was not merely the result of flawed mediation tools, but a direct reflection of the complexity of the network of local, national, and international actors – their conflicting goals, and their unequal capacities to influence outcomes.

Thus, a precise analysis of the actors is essential to understanding their sources of power, vulnerabilities, relational patterns, and their readiness to engage in a sustainable resolution process. This analysis does not limit itself to the direct parties but also encompasses indirect actors who influence the conflict, including external powers, local notables, youth, and women – vital community components capable of playing a pivotal role in peacebuilding..

Below is a structured mapping of the main actors, their interests, sources of power, weaknesses, relationships, and positions toward a solution:

Position on a Solution	Relationship with Other Actors	Weaknesses	Sources of Power	Primary Interests	Actor
Complex and fluctuating – tend toward conditional acceptance that preserves core interests or rejection of solutions that strip them of current gains.	Directly hostile; competing over resources and influence.	Financial and human exhaustion; loss of legitimacy / public support over time (Houthis); reliance on external backing (legitimacy forces).	Military power / widespread arms; financial support; tribal networks; limited popular mobilization.	Political and military control; local influence; ownership of disputed land; settling scores / revenge; personal security.	Direct Parties to the Conflict (National Resistance Forces and the Houthi Group)
Conditional and changeable – depends on the commitment of the direct actor to a solution and on whether the solution preserves some of their gains or safety.	Strong, dependent alliance with the side they support; hostile toward the opposing side.	Their fate is tied to the direct party (fragility); lack of independent decision-making capacity; exposure to community pressure.	Ability to influence public opinion within their networks; provision of logistical and material support; information and human resources.	Economic gains as contractors or beneficiaries of funding; protection and security; strengthening social status through alliance; ideological loyalty.	Local Indirect Actors (Supporters / Affiliates)
Strong supporters of peaceful and restorative solutions; seek to translate theoretical agreements into practice.	Neutral or leaning toward certain actors but must maintain distance to mediate.	Declining influence amid the spread of weapons and politically driven conflict; lack of tools to enforce modern solutions.	Moral and ethical authority; wide relational networks; traditional legitimacy as arbiters and mediators.	Restoring public peace and stability; preserving traditional social status and influence; mediation and protection of lives.	Local Notables and Community Leaders
Supportive of solutions at the formal level, but face enormous obstacles in implementation due to institutional weakness.	Contradictory due to entanglement with local and national loyalties and war dynamics.	Institutional weakness and declining influence; vulnerability to competing loyalties or warring factions; lack of effectiveness on the ground.	Formal and legal authority; limited governmental resources (financial and human).	Restoring state authority and rule of law; ensuring public security and stability; fulfilling official duties.	Local Government Representatives
Indirectly obstructive – tend to prolong conflicts that serve their interests or undermine solutions that do not secure their strategic goals.	Exploitative and allied with certain actors; alliances shift according to interests.	Limited understanding of local context; political or military cost exposure.	Open financial and military support; influence over local leadership (dependency); access to media.	Advancing broader political agendas; control over strategic areas; weakening adversaries through local proxies.	External Actors (National / Regional)
Strong supporters of peaceful and sustainable solutions; seek recovery- and reconstruction-focused approaches.	Influenced by divisions but possess significant potential to form neutral peace-oriented coalitions.	Marginalization and underrepresentation; limited financial resources; need for capacity-building; deep psychological trauma.	Capacity for mobilization and social change; large demographic weight, particularly youth; potential to bridge divides.	Personal and community security; livelihood and development opportunities; meaningful participation in decision-making; justice and reparations.	Youth and Women



ROOT CAUSES, STRUCTURAL FACTORS, DRIVING FACTORS, AND IMMEDIATE TRIGGERS:

Understanding the conflict requires distinguishing between several levels of causation. First are the historical and root causes that accumulated over time – often linked to unresolved, longstanding issues. Second are the structural, objective factors: the tangible conditions that deepen tension in systemic ways. Third are the driving factors: the continuous engines fueling the conflict. Fourth are the immediate triggers – the “spark” that ignited full-scale violence. Ignoring any of these levels produces incomplete or ineffective solutions.

First: Root Causes

The root causes of the conflict in Al-Sarari intersect across three integrated dimensions that collectively created a context primed for military escalation.

- **Political and Governance-Related Causes:**

The historical weakness of state institutions and the absence of the rule of law stand out as central causes. This vacuum allowed the logic of force to replace judicial processes. The national conflict was instrumentalized as a cover for settling local political and ideological scores. Conflict actors – particularly the Houthi movement – politicized sectarian and tribal ties, exploiting Hashemite lineage as a tool for mobilization and escalation. Social affiliations were transformed into fuel for war. Added to this is the historical legacy of partisan polarization, which produced deep social fractures and weakened community cohesion in the face of rising tensions.

- **Social and Cultural Causes:**

The Hashemite lineage of the Al-Junaid family constituted a historical dimension that was ideologically exploited within the broader contest for power in Yemen.

This divide deepened due to longstanding doctrinal differences between the village's Zaydi-Shiite identity and the Sunni identity of surrounding areas, creating latent tensions that were easily manipulated. More than 150 years of unresolved familial and tribal disputes over influence and revenge provided fertile ground for modern violence. Simultaneously, traditional social regulation mechanisms eroded: tribal mediation lost its influence in the face of escalating armed violence, and sectarian loyalty began to supersede tribal loyalty. Internal power struggles within the Al-Junaid family, and reliance on external forces, further exacerbated the conflict and isolated the family from its social surroundings.

- **Economic and Developmental Causes:**

Chronic disputes over scarce resources – especially water sources and agricultural lands – were inherited across generations. These disputes intensified as a result of economic fragility stemming from the state's failure to deliver sustainable development, which fueled poverty and marginalization. This difficult economic environment, combined with demographic pressures and high unemployment, rendered youth highly vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups – supplying a steady stream of fighters and sustaining the conflict.

Second: Structural / Objective Factors

A set of concrete circumstances shaped a conducive environment for the eruption and escalation of the conflict.

- **Geopolitical and Institutional Factors:** The strategic geographic location of Al-Sarari gave it significant military value, especially for controlling access routes to Taiz. This made the village a primary target from the beginning of the war. This coincided with the collapse of state authority and institutions, which enabled the militarization of the area. The siege imposed on Taiz magnified the village's importance and linked its fate to the broader dynamics of the war. Meanwhile, the early alliance between the General People's Congress (GPC) and the Houthis shifted power balances in the area.
- **Social and Economic Factors:** The absence of state authority and development reinforced tribal and sectarian loyalties as substitutes within an already fragile social fabric marked by deep historical divides.
- **The conflict fed on shared tribal interests** – notably the desire for revenge against the Al-Junaid family and the struggle over key water resources. Economically, poverty, deteriorating livelihoods, and resource scarcity – especially water – intensified social pressure. These conditions made unemployed youth readily available as human fuel for armed groups.
- **Security Factors:** The proliferation of weapons and the general security breakdown – paired with the absence of accountability – reinforced a culture of impunity. This situation worsened as tribal and formal protection mechanisms declined, making attacks on property and livelihoods common and easy.

Third: Driving Factors

A set of ongoing drivers continuously fueled the conflict and impeded resolution:

- The coup against the legitimate government strengthened the Houthis' presence and enabled them to mobilize the area in their favor. Repeated failures of formal and tribal mediation, coupled with the absence of autonomous local decision-making, entrenched the belief that armed confrontation was the only viable solution.
- The siege on Taiz transformed Al-Sarari into a vital strategic battleground. This coincided with structured sectarian and political polarization, as residents were ideologically mobilized amid an environment filled with hate speech and sectarian slogans.
- Funding and mobilization – via flows of fighters and military resources – prevented the conflict from being reduced to a solvable, localized dispute. Profiteers of war imposed their political and economic interests, especially through forceful seizure of property.
- Impunity and persistent violations undermined faith in peaceful solutions. Accumulated grievances and the absence of independent human-rights interventions pushed parties toward further escalation.

Fourth: Immediate Triggers

A series of events served as the direct spark for the outbreak of full-scale armed conflict:

- The blockade and cutting of the main road leading to Taiz were perceived as direct provocations by the Houthis, triggering counter-reactions from the popular resistance and the national army. The refusal to allow humanitarian corridors intensified military pressure on the village and served as the main spark for the conflict's explosion.
- External interference in local tribal authority led to the collapse of the tribal leader's legitimacy and transformed Al-Sarari into a subordinate stronghold under Houthi command through direct control and the appointment of loyal leadership.
- The village was turned into a military base and a recruitment center for Houthi supporters – posing an immediate threat to neighboring villages. This occurred through sudden militarization, introduction of heavy weapons, and using the village as an offensive launching point.
- Sectarian-provocative activities, including ritual performances and events associated with the Houthi movement, deepened communal divides. The Sunni-majority neighboring areas perceived these activities as a direct threat to their identity.
- Tensions escalated due to reciprocal assaults, arbitrary detentions, kidnappings, and indiscriminate attacks on properties, farms, and Khat trees – the main source of local income.

Summary of Causal Analysis:

The conflict in Al-Sarari reveals a sequential interaction of multiple levels of causation.

Root causes – historical state weakness, sectarian divisions, and long-standing tribal disputes over resources – created a fragile environment ripe for ignition.

Structural factors – such as the village’s strategic location and institutional collapse after 2015 – amplified this fragility and turned the village into a military target.

Driving factors – political polarization, sectarian mobilization by the Houthi movement, and failed mediation – further militarized the local community.

Finally, immediate triggers – such as road blockages and the imposition of a siege – ignited full-scale armed confrontation, producing the devastating impacts documented in the next sections.



IMPACTS OF THE CONFLICT

Documenting the impacts of the conflict is essential for illustrating the scale of the crisis and justifying the urgent need for resolution. These impacts extend far beyond direct loss of life and property, encompassing the social, economic, political, psychological, and service-related dimensions, as well as implications for restorative and transitional justice and peacebuilding.

Affected Population and Overall Scale of Impact:

The conflict caused catastrophic devastation affecting residents of Al-Sarari and neighboring villages in the Dhi al-Barh subdistrict. The most severe impact, however, was concentrated in Al-Sarari itself, which suffered 70% of the total damage. Humanitarian data indicates that more than 254 families – approximately 1,778 individuals – were directly affected across the subdistrict, with women representing 50% and children representing more than 20%. The conflict resulted in 46 deaths and 50 injuries, including 6 individuals with permanent disabilities. Al-Sarari and its supporters constitute 32% of all casualties. The conflict also caused the forced displacement of more than 150 families from all villages of the subdistrict: 70 families from Al-Sarari (al-Junaid) and 80 families from other villages, mostly men and youth. Material losses include the complete destruction of 142 homes, partial damage to 95 homes (50 in Al-Sarari), and the confiscation of land and property belonging to 54 Al-Junaid families. Infrastructure did not escape damage: the health unit was entirely destroyed, and seven schools were partially damaged. Even families not directly involved in the conflict continue to suffer due to ongoing land violations, limited access to justice, and the prevention of pro-Houthi displaced families from returning home – while their property is looted – reinforcing an exclusionary dynamic grounded in coercive control.

Social (Non-Material) Impacts:

The conflict caused deep ruptures in the social fabric. Neighbors became adversaries, and familial and clan bonds disintegrated due to raids and media-driven misinformation. The value system and tribal norms that once regulated relationships and prevented bloodshed collapsed, replaced by the logic of force and domination. Shared social spaces – markets, communal gatherings – contracted. A shared tribal identity eroded, and the role of traditional sheikhs diminished in favor of sectarian loyalties and armed leaders. Cultural heritage, once a unifying force, was marginalized. The spread of weapons and immense psychological pressure intensified community and domestic violence. Hate speech generated long-term psychological trauma, especially for children raised in an environment of violence and division. Women and girls bore a disproportionate burden: security restrictions hindered access to services, education, and humanitarian assistance.

Economic Impacts:

The area suffered complete economic paralysis. Livelihoods based on agriculture and livestock collapsed, pushing youth to join battlefronts as an alternative source of income. Widespread looting targeted homes, property, and agricultural lands belonging to Houthi-aligned families from al-Junaid, destroying the economic foundations of displaced households. As

a result, most families rely entirely on scarce humanitarian aid, while displaced families live in extremely fragile conditions. The scale of property destruction created massive legal and economic challenges related to reparations, requiring significant resources to document and rebuild.

Impacts on Essential Services (Material Impacts):

The collapse of state institutions created a vacuum in local governance, deepening service deficits and entrenching feelings of marginalization. The health sector collapsed completely after the destruction of the health unit, worsening disease spread – especially among the elderly and women. With weakened security and justice institutions, weapons proliferation and revenge logic overshadowed civil solutions.

Educational infrastructure was devastated: seven schools were damaged at a cost exceeding **USD 20,000**, depriving hundreds of children of schooling for years and increasing dropout rates and youth recruitment.

The area suffered from water shortages and complete deterioration of roads, raising daily living costs and complicating service access. Negative media portrayals discouraged local and international organizations from implementing humanitarian and development projects in the area, hindering recovery prospects..

Impact on Peacebuilding Efforts:

Military violations and the failure of direct tribal mediation undermined trust in community mechanisms to build peace in militarized contexts. A sustainable peace process in Al-Sarari must begin by strengthening restorative justice, addressing root drivers of conflict, then moving toward justice, accountability, and reparations for 2016 violations.

The documented impacts reveal a destructive cycle generating a web of interlinked needs.

Material destruction produced urgent humanitarian needs for shelter and reconstruction. Social fragmentation and the collapse of traditional values created pressing needs for psychosocial support and community reconciliation. Women and girls face compounded burdens: with men forcibly displaced, they became primary caregivers under harsh economic and security conditions – creating particular needs for protection and economic empowerment. The interplay of material and non-material impacts creates a vicious cycle: economic collapse undermines social recovery, and insecurity deepens psychological trauma.



CONFLICT-DRIVEN NEEDS FROM SURVIVAL TO PEACEBUILDING

Needs in Al-Sarari form a complex, layered network ranging from immediate survival requirements to long-term sustainable peace. The community emphasizes that psychological and social stability is a prerequisite for any meaningful material recovery.

1. Immediate Survival Needs:

The most urgent needs revolve around ensuring security and immediate justice – particularly resolving land and property disputes, which are the primary source of tension. This requires providing immediate legal support to affected families. Equally essential is restoring vital infrastructure: rehabilitating the main road to facilitate aid delivery, rebuilding the destroyed health unit – which has led to preventable deaths – and repairing damaged schools. Emergency response also requires meeting basic humanitarian needs by reconstructing destroyed homes, ensuring access to water, and initiating reparations and income-generating opportunities such as cash-for-work programs.

2. Recovery and Restoration of Normal Life:

Once survival needs are secured, efforts must rapidly shift toward recovery. This includes rebuilding social capital through inclusive community dialogue mechanisms and rehabilitating schools to safeguard children’s futures. Economic empowerment for women and youth – through livelihood projects and micro-loans – is essential to provide alternatives to the war economy. These efforts should be accompanied by specialized protection programs to ensure the safety of the most vulnerable groups.

3. Long-Term Sustainable Peace:

Preventing recurrence of conflict requires embedding recovery efforts within a comprehensive vision for sustainable development. This includes addressing deep psychological trauma through specialized psychosocial support services and restoring sustainable livelihoods through rehabilitation of agricultural and pastoral assets. These three levels are closely interconnected; neglecting any of them undermines progress in the others, turning unmet needs into new grievances and renewed drivers of conflict.

To meet these needs effectively, a **Community-Led Approach** is essential. This entails activating community reconciliation and consensus-building committees and providing them with the financial and logistical support necessary for rapid action. It also requires ensuring the meaningful participation of youth and women – who constituted a significant share of dialogue participants on restorative justice – in local service-management committees to guarantee sustainability of solutions and prevent renewed exploitation of community vulnerabilities.

Challenges to Restorative Justice and Peaceful Coexistence:

1. Political and Institutional Challenges (Structural Framework):

The most prominent challenge lies in the structural collapse of state authority. Fragmented political decision-making and the multiplicity of power centers have fundamentally undermined the effectiveness of formal and judicial institutions. This institutional erosion has produced an enabling environment for impunity, allowing armed actors to operate above the law and effectively eliminating any credible, neutral reference point to which parties can turn for dispute resolution. The crisis is further compounded by weak institutional will for neutrality. Many formal and local tribal institutions have proven either unable or unwilling to adopt impartial, peaceful solutions – especially when such solutions clash with the military agendas of externally backed parties. Moreover, the sheer scale of those affected makes it extremely difficult to reach a comprehensive and fair agreement covering all outstanding issues, including land, blood (loss of life), missing persons, and property. This significantly complicates any pathway toward justice.

2. Security Challenges (Immediate Environment):

Persistent instability and the widespread proliferation of weapons pose a direct challenge to any attempt at community recovery, creating a constant risk environment that makes the safe return of displaced residents nearly impossible. The accumulation of material disputes over land and property represents a core challenge requiring urgent legal intervention. Delayed resolution of these issues threatens to turn them into new violent conflicts, thereby perpetuating the cycle of violence. In addition, individuals – especially women – face significant obstacles in accessing law-enforcement and justice institutions, entrenching a profound sense of neglect and pushing many toward favoring tribal revenge over legal remedies.

3. Social and Cultural Challenges (Societal Depth):

Efforts to foster coexistence struggle to overcome entrenched historical resentments and accumulated contemporary grievances, which have left deep wounds in the social fabric. This has led to a sharp decline in trust among community components and a weakening of the effectiveness of traditional mediating figures, who previously served as key points of convergence. Negative stereotyping of the village as a “flashpoint of tension” poses a major cultural challenge, obstructing the return of original residents and their positive reintegration with neighboring communities. The crisis is worsened by the outmigration of young people

and skilled women, weakening the village's capacity to generate new leadership with a reconciliatory vision. The persistence of hate speech and mutual delegitimization remains a significant driver of conflict, sustaining divisions and obstructing all reconciliation efforts.

4. Economic Challenges (Drivers of Conflict):

The collapse of services and infrastructure has weakened community resilience to shocks and led to a dangerous increase in dependence on external aid, undermining prospects for sustainable, self-driven recovery. This is compounded by worsening economic conditions and widespread poverty, which turn control over scarce resources into a primary objective and a source of income – thus fueling the continuation of conflict rather than incentivizing its resolution. The complexity of reparations constitutes a massive economic and legal challenge. Claims for compensation for destroyed property require accurate surveying and documentation mechanisms and substantial financial resources that are currently unavailable, hindering efforts to build trust and acknowledge violations. Finally, the reluctance of development organizations to operate in the village – due to security risks and negative media portrayals – deprives the community of the investments needed to transition from relief to sustainable development.

5. Challenges Specific to Restorative Justice:

One of the fundamental obstacles is the absence of a clear legal or customary framework for adopting restorative justice mechanisms, leaving them without a defined procedural foundation. Conflicting priorities also emerge as a major dilemma. While there is a community preference for reconciliation, victims insist that accountability, truth-seeking, and reparations must come first. This necessitates significant efforts to reconcile the restorative approach (which emphasizes repair and reconciliation) with the punitive approach (which emphasizes punishment). The neglect of gender considerations threatens the inclusivity of solutions, as there are no mechanisms in place to ensure the effective participation of women in the design and implementation of programs. Furthermore, limited awareness of and trust in restorative mechanisms as alternatives to retributive justice, combined with a lack of resources and expertise to design and implement effective, sustainable programs, further constrains their application.

6. Challenges Related to Local Legal Frameworks and Relevant Legislation (Formal and Informal):

Legislation / Framework	Scope	Implementation Challenges	Notes
Arbitration Law No. 22 of 1992	Settlement of local disputes through peaceful means	Weak enforcement of arbitration procedures; low legal awareness; lack of trust in arbitration bodies.	Heavy continued reliance on tribal and customary solutions.
Mediation Law for Dispute Settlement No. 10 of 2014	Aims to strengthen alternatives to litigation and reduce case backlogs	Weak implementation of mediation outcomes due to the absence of implementing regulations; limited training programs.	Need to build mediators' capacities and accredit effective mediation centers.
Judicial Authority Law No. 1 of 1991	Organizes the judiciary and ensures its independence in dispute resolution	Judicial processes affected by security and political conditions; weak oversight.	Case backlogs and delays in adjudicating local disputes.
Local Authority Law No. 4 of 2000	Empowerment of local councils to manage local affairs and resolve disputes within their jurisdiction	Weak coordination between local councils and central authorities; insufficient powers to resolve disputes; absence of elected councils.	Weak community participation in managing disputes.
Civil and Commercial Procedures Law No. 40 of 2002	Regulates litigation procedures and dispute adjudication	Slow and complex litigation procedures; weak enforcement mechanisms for judgments.	Need to simplify procedures and accelerate case disposition.
Law on the Legal Profession No. 13 of 2010	Regulates the legal profession and supports justice and dispute resolution	Limited role of lawyers in mediation and amicable dispute resolution.	Absence of specialized training programs on mediation and arbitration for lawyers.

A review of the legal frameworks governing local dispute resolution in Yemen shows that, despite their breadth and diversity, national laws still suffer from clear weaknesses in implementation and institutional coordination. Arbitration Law No. (22) of 1992 and Mediation Law No. (10) of 2014 laid advanced foundations for peaceful dispute settlement; however, low legal awareness and the absence of specialized institutional infrastructure have greatly reduced their effectiveness in practice. Similarly, the Judicial Authority Law No. (1) of 1991, despite guaranteeing judicial independence, has been negatively affected by security and political conditions, leading to delays in adjudicating cases and local disputes. Furthermore, the Local Authority Law No. (4) of 2000 has not been adequately implemented to enable local councils to play an effective role in managing disputes within their jurisdictions, given the absence of elected councils and weak coordination with central authorities. The Civil and Commercial Procedures Law No. (40) of 2002 has faced criticism

for lengthy and complex procedures and slow enforcement of judgments. In parallel, the Law on the Legal Profession No. (13) of 2010 has not been optimally utilized to expand the role of lawyers as mediators in amicable dispute resolution, resulting in continued reliance on tribal and customary mechanisms alone. On this basis, it can be said that the key challenges related to legal frameworks for resolving local conflicts in Yemen lie in weak enforcement of existing laws, weak institutional coordination, and the absence of a supportive legal infrastructure for formal alternatives to litigation. This situation calls for a comprehensive review of procedures and legislation to strengthen sustainable local justice.

It is thus clear that the challenges facing restorative justice and coexistence in Al-Sarari are not isolated obstacles but an integrated, interlocking system that mutually reinforces itself. Political and institutional weakness prevents addressing security challenges, which in turn create a hostile environment for investment and development, thereby exacerbating economic challenges. This vicious circle, in turn, feeds social and cultural challenges: violence becomes normalized, and community trust erodes. Consequently, any intervention that focuses on a single challenge in isolation is destined to fail. Sustainable peacebuilding requires a comprehensive, simultaneous approach that addresses this intertwined system of challenges as an integrated whole.

Opportunities for Rebuilding Trust and Peaceful Coexistence

Despite the bleak picture painted by the interconnected system of challenges, there remains a core foundation for solutions rooted within the community itself. The failure of major political actors to reach a lasting settlement has opened the door for local societal forces – such as women, youth, local mediators, and non-governmental organizations – to intervene and propose practical solutions. These actors have demonstrated a notable ability to resolve disputes, offering hope for building peace from the bottom up, independent of competing political agendas.

This paper reveals that these opportunities are not merely theoretical aspirations, but rather existing community assets that can be activated. At the forefront of these assets is widespread societal fatigue from conflict, alongside a strong preference for reconciliation as a mechanism for recovery. This creates a socially receptive climate for peacebuilding interventions. In addition, the presence of shared interests and pragmatic needs—such as the urgent necessity to rehabilitate basic services – provides an actionable entry point for dialogue and for moving beyond ideological divides.

The proposed theory of change must therefore be grounded directly in these assets: by activating the role of neutral local actors, drawing on successful restorative justice experiences in neighboring areas, and leveraging available international support to provide local initiatives with the momentum and resources needed. This approach ensures that peace efforts remain rooted in local realities and capable of long-term sustainability.

The following table summarizes the key opportunities for rebuilding trust and peaceful coexistence:

Opportunity	Description
Societal Preference for Reconciliation	Analysis indicates that most of the local community (in Al-Sarari) prefers reconciliation as a mechanism for recovery, creating a favorable environment for restorative justice interventions.
Shared Interests	Common needs among residents – such as rehabilitation of roads, schools, and health services – provide a practical starting point for dialogue and early pragmatic agreements.
Unified Cultural Status	The village’s historical and religious status as a traditional center of learning can be used to unify the community around shared values rather than rigid sectarian alignments.
Growing Fatigue from Conflict	Widespread community exhaustion resulting from internal resource disputes and the traumatic impact of armed conflict creates strong incentive for peace and stability.
	Elders in the village and surrounding areas who are respected and capable of playing a positive mediating role.
Presence of Peace Actors	Neutral mediators and mediation committees composed of social figures, youth, women, and political actors not directly involved in the conflict, who hold community respect and have the capacity to communicate with all sides.
Effectiveness of Trained Local Mechanisms	Beginning with clear grievances – such as restoring property and especially land – can serve as a major entry point for building trust.
International Support for Restorative Justice	Restorative justice mechanisms in other districts of Taiz have successfully resolved over 1,300 disputes, including complex cases involving water projects, land, and homicides – demonstrating community capacity for reconciliation when supported.
Ongoing Community Mobilization	Continued generous support from international donors for security, justice, and restorative justice mechanisms creates significant opportunities for sustained interventions.
Education and Vocational Training	Civil society organizations already working on restorative justice represent a major opportunity. These initiatives have brought together local actors, community notables, and political and social figures in other areas for mutual listening, understanding root causes, and generating consensual solutions.
Education and Vocational Training	Encouraging investment in education and vocational training increases young people’s prospects for a future outside cycle of violence and armed conflict.



PROPOSED SOLUTIONS ROADMAP

The solutions articulated in the community's proposed Theory of Change rest on a fundamental assumption: "If local actors – including women and youth – are empowered to lead a comprehensive restorative justice process, supported by service-based and developmental interventions that address root grievances and operate within a supportive legal framework, this will rebuild trust and social cohesion, thereby creating a solid foundation for sustainable peaceful coexistence in Al-Sarari and similar areas."

This vision is realized through three integrated and simultaneous pathways:

Short-Term Solutions (6–12 months):

Building Trust and Meeting Immediate Needs: This level focuses on halting further deterioration, addressing urgent needs, and establishing the minimum trust required to advance toward deeper stages of reconciliation.

Politically and Institutionally:

- Formation of a joint community committee composed of respected representatives from all parties, ensuring active participation of women, youth, and representatives from security and local authorities. Its mandate will include resolving urgent disputes, managing dialogue, following up on contentious issues, and serving as a liaison with official institutions.
- Concluding an initial de-escalation charter, consisting of a written preliminary agreement between community elders in the village and surrounding areas, mediated by the community committee. The charter will include commitments to halt media incitement, ensure safe movement for civilians, and refrain from creating any new triggers for conflict.
- Activating an urgent legal track for land disputes by establishing a fast-response mechanism in cooperation with local authorities, security forces, the judiciary, and the Bar Association. This mechanism will document and register claims related to seized properties, freeze any further transactions, and represent affected individuals before the courts.
- Holding an official meeting with local authorities and security sectors to present dialogue outcomes, secure their support, and establish an official cooperation channel.

Economically and Humanitarianly:

- Conducting a comprehensive damage and needs assessment through a detailed field study to document damages, create a verified database to guide assistance and reconstruction, and share the data with relevant authorities.
- Launching cash-for-work programs for rehabilitating infrastructure such as repairing the main road, the health unit, and local schools, with priority employment for local residents from both sides of the conflict to generate shared interests.

- Ensuring transparent distribution of humanitarian aid through joint community committees – including women – to supervise distribution, ensure aid reaches its rightful recipients, and prevent political manipulation.
- Providing emergency economic support packages for the most affected households, including basic agricultural tools or small unconditional cash grants to help them resume minimum livelihood activities upon return.

Socially and Culturally:

- Launching informal dialogue initiatives through safe, small-scale community meetings (e.g., maqeel gatherings or women’s circles) to break the ice and discuss shared service-related needs.
- Providing primary psychosocial support services, especially for women and children, to address trauma through specialized mobile teams.
- Rapid rehabilitation of essential services, including restoring the functionality of the health unit and repairing damaged classrooms to ensure children’s return to school.
- Implementing a local “Peace Media” campaign to counter rumors and hate speech through local social media platforms and influential figures, focusing on sharing positive stories of cooperation.

Medium-Term Solutions (1–3 years):

Recovery and Rebuilding Social Bonds: This stage marks the shift from relief to recovery, focusing on consolidating solutions, building foundations for coexistence through joint charters and initiatives, and addressing the immediate drivers of conflict while rebuilding local institutions.

Politically and Institutionally:

- ☒ Drafting a community Charter of Honor, supervised by legal experts, outlining principles of coexistence and dispute resolution. The charter should gain broad community consensus and be adopted as a local reference.
- ☒ Strengthening alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms through training of joint community committee members on restorative justice principles, mediation and negotiation techniques, and documentation skills to enhance their ability to resolve complex disputes.

- Improving access to justice for vulnerable groups by establishing free legal assistance programs, especially for women, to help them file claims related to property and damages with formal bodies.
- Establishing a Community Peace Observatory composed of trained youth and women to monitor violations of the Charter of Honor, document new disputes, and submit periodic reports to the joint committee and local authorities.

Economically and Developmentally:

- Launching economic empowerment programs by implementing income-generating projects and small loans for women and youth, with a focus on rehabilitating agricultural and livestock assets.
- Reconstructing damaged homes through a comprehensive housing rehabilitation program based on detailed damage assessments and community participation.
- Establishing a community revolving development fund to finance small joint projects between individuals from different sides of the conflict – such as water projects or local markets – to foster economic interdependence.

Socially and Culturally:

- Establishing expanded community dialogue forums to transition from informal meetings to structured, inclusive forums for discussing root causes of conflict and agreeing on the Charter of Honor.
- Integrating peace education into the school system by incorporating activities on tolerance, coexistence, and conflict resolution.
- Launching community media campaigns to combat hate speech through religious, educational, and social media platforms, addressing negative stereotypes..

Long-Term Solutions (3–5 years):

Sustainable Development and Ensuring Non-Recurrence of Conflict: This level aims to address the structural root causes of conflict, embed peace within the social fabric, and ensure its sustainability through comprehensive development.

Politically and Institutionally:

- Strengthening participatory local governance by building the capacities of local authorities and community committees in conflict management and project planning to ensure local ownership of the peace process.
- Developing a local legal framework for restorative justice, integrating the outcomes of community dialogues and customary agreements into an official legal framework recognized by authorities to ensure the sustainability of solutions.
- Institutionalizing the Community Charter of Honor as a recognized and formal reference for dispute resolution within the area.

Economically and Developmentally:

- Implementing strategic development projects to address core economic root causes, such as joint water and sanitation systems, road rehabilitation, and developing shared local markets.
- Connecting the region to wider development networks by attracting development organizations to invest in Al-Sarari and integrating the area into broader governorate-level development plans.
- Supporting agricultural and pastoral cooperatives to rehabilitate local assets and sustainably restore livelihoods.

Socially and Culturally:

- Activating inter-community dialogue by organizing regular cultural, sports, and social events bringing together youth and families from Al-Sarari and neighboring villages.
- Embedding reconciliation culture within the education system by integrating peacebuilding and conflict-resolution principles into curricula or key school activities.
- Creating mechanisms for collective memory and acknowledgment of harm, such as community-led initiatives to document victims' stories, mutual recognition of suffering, establishing symbolic memorials, or an annual reconciliation day.
- Reviving shared cultural heritage by supporting artistic and cultural activities that celebrate common identity and the historically rooted values of tolerance in the area.

How Can the Local Community Own the Solutions?

Local ownership of solutions in Al-Sarari and neighboring villages is not merely a desired outcome – it is the only mechanism for ensuring sustainability. This can be achieved through:

- **Local leadership of initiatives:** Mediation, dialogue, and project management committees must be composed of community members themselves, with technical and financial support provided to them – rather than imposing external solutions.
- **Participatory decision-making:** Decisions on priority setting, project design, and implementation must be made through inclusive participatory mechanisms that ensure all voices are heard, especially marginalized groups such as women and youth.
- **Transparency and accountability:** Project budgets and dialogue outcomes should be publicly shared with the community to build trust and block opportunities for actors who benefit from disorder.
- **Building local capacities:** Investment in training local actors to manage their own affairs in the long term, reducing dependency on external support.

Summary of an Integrated Solutions Model

The model is based on integration and simultaneity. Economic solutions cannot succeed in a collapsed security environment; social reconciliation cannot occur when grievances are unaddressed and basic needs unmet; and no intervention can thrive without institutional support.

Thus, the model functions as a cohesive package:

Immediate service interventions help build trust » which enables community dialogue » which produces agreements on justice issues » which opens space for sustainable development projects » which reinforce stability and prevent relapse into violence.

This upward, spiral model transforms the vicious cycle of violence into a constructive cycle of peace.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to Strengthen Reconciliation and Peaceful Coexistence

For the National Government:

- Activate the legislative framework for alternative justice by expediting the issuance of the executive regulations for the Mediation Law No. (10) of 2014 and developing a legal framework that recognizes community-based restorative justice mechanisms as a complementary component of the formal judiciary.
- Strengthen judicial authority and local institutions by providing the necessary support to implement the Local Authority Law and ensuring the enforcement of judicial rulings related to property disputes in order to end impunity.
- Allocate national resources for reconstruction, including designating budget lines within state development plans to rehabilitate essential infrastructure (roads, healthcare, schools) in conflict-affected areas such as Al-Sarari .
- Adopt national policies to combat hate speech by activating the legal framework that criminalizes sectarian or regional incitement and holding individuals and media institutions accountable for promoting it.

For Local Authorities (Governorate and District Levels):

- Provide political and security backing for local peace initiatives through formal recognition of mediation and reconciliation committees and ensuring their protection and that of their coordinators.
- Allocate resources from the local budget to support peaceful coexistence by funding small-scale joint service projects that reinforce mutual interests between conflict parties.
- Adopt the role of an effective coordinator for development and humanitarian interventions to ensure complementarity, prevent overlap, and direct efforts toward community-identified priorities.
- Adhere to a policy of “positive neutrality” in managing the conflict by acting as an impartial mediator between all parties, facilitating dialogue, and providing a secure environment for implementing development projects.

For International Donors and Agencies:

- Adopt flexible and long-term funding mechanisms for peacebuilding by shifting from short-term projects to strategic support that allows local initiatives to adapt to a changing context.
- Prioritize funding for interventions that address conflict drivers, such as legal assistance to resolve land disputes, cash-for-work programs, and rehabilitation of vital services.
- Direct support toward building local capacities rather than direct implementation, empowering civil society organizations and community initiatives to manage and execute projects themselves to ensure sustainability.
- Design humanitarian assistance to contribute to peace, linking relief programs to opportunities that generate shared interests – for example, infrastructure projects that serve and employ people from all conflict sides.
- Support the documentation and dissemination of successful restorative justice models to promote learning and experience-sharing among Yemeni communities facing similar conflicts.

For Local Civil Society Organizations:

- Take the lead in facilitating dialogue and implementing projects by acting as a neutral mediator, providing safe spaces for dialogue, and managing proposed service and development projects.
- Adopt a conflict-sensitive approach in all interventions by continuously analyzing the context, designing programs that avoid fueling tensions, and focusing on connectors between communities.
- Lead independent documentation and monitoring of violations, using data to advocate for accountability and reparations, and providing legal and technical support for victims to claim their rights.
- Build community awareness around peace culture by launching campaigns on the importance of restorative justice, coexistence, and the dangers of hate speech, with a special focus on youth and women.

For Mediators and Community Leaders:

- Lead reconciliation efforts with neutrality and integrity, using their social influence and personal networks to mediate effectively while maintaining equal distance from all parties.
- Act as the moral compass and safety valve of the community, upholding values of justice and forgiveness, countering polarization and external incitement, and defending the community's Charter of Honor.
- Continuously seek to improve skills in modern mediation, human rights principles, and restorative justice to increase the effectiveness of their interventions.
- Mobilize broad community participation in peace initiatives by building communication networks with all stakeholders to ensure inclusive and representative solutions, especially for women and youth.

For the Local Community:

- Engage actively in peace initiatives and assume ownership by participating in joint committees, dialogue sessions, project implementation, and ensuring sustainability.
- Commit to principles of peace and reject violence in daily interactions by adopting the Charter of Honor as a behavioral reference and demonstrating genuine willingness for forgiveness and reconciliation.
- Practice community oversight and accountability, monitoring commitments and demanding transparency in the management of projects and aid.
- Support positive, peace-seeking leaders by backing individuals and groups working sincerely for the common good and isolating spoilers and promoters of hate.



APPLICABILITY IN SIMILAR CONTEXTS: AN ANALYTICAL AND OPERATIONAL METHODOLOGY

Transforming the Al-Sarari experience from a mere case study into a replicable methodology lies in moving from describing what happened to systematizing how to deal with what is happening. This does not mean offering a “ready-made recipe,” but rather a flexible framework that can be adapted to local specificities.

First: Assessing Generalizability Methodology Rather Than a Recipe

Transferable Core Principles:

- **Centrality of Restorative Justice:** By focusing on restorative justice as the primary entry point for repairing harm and rebuilding relationships and as a supportive and reinforcing track to retributive justice, which may be unrealistic in contexts of state weakness.
- **Local Leadership and Ownership:** Emphasizing that sustainable solutions must emerge from within the local community and be led by neutral local actors – including youth, women, and respected elders. This ensures cultural appropriateness and enhances acceptance.
- **Separating the Partial Conflict from the Larger One:** It is crucial to isolate the local conflict as much as possible from national and regional polarizations or at least neutralize their influence, in order to safeguard the internal reconciliation process. Without such insulation, local solutions remain hostage to broader agendas.
- **Development-Oriented Reconciliation:** Linking trust-building and reconciliation efforts with joint development projects that meet the livelihood needs of all parties. This approach shifts the focus from past grievances to shared future interests.
- **Engaging Official Actors as Supportive Partners:** Working to involve and activate the role of formal institutions in providing legal and enforcement backing to community solutions and securing their sustainability—without allowing these institutions to impose top-down solutions.

Characteristics of Applicable Social Ruptures: Contexts Where the Model Fits

The model is suitable for settings that share the following characteristics:

- **Hybrid, Multi-Dimensional Conflicts:** Where horizontal cleavages (sectarian, ethnic, regional) intersect with vertical divisions (political, economic interests).
- **Fractured Coexistence:** Communities that once enjoyed kinship ties and coexistence, but whose social fabric has been torn and eroded by new drivers linked to the broader conflict context.
- **Exploitative External Interference:** The presence of external actors or elites who exploit and fuel local divisions to achieve their own gains.

Second: A Practical Roadmap for Adaptation and Application

Diagnostic Phase: Understanding Before Intervention

Applying the analytical framework used for Al-Sarari to the new context in order to identify causes (root, structural, driving, and immediate), analyze actors and conflict drivers, levels of impact, interacting needs, and structural challenges – thus avoiding the imposition of inappropriate solutions. Particular emphasis should be placed on conflict-sensitivity analysis and entry through “connectors” rather than “dividers.”

- Analyzing, studying, and evaluating previous efforts (prior initiatives and proposed solutions) to identify reasons for their failure or success and to extract lessons learned that help avoid repeating mistakes and build on positive experiences.
- Comparing patterns and assessing the degree of alignment between the current conflict and that of Al-Sarari, in order to determine which components require substantial modification.

Third: Implementation Phase

Gradual Construction

Forming a local peace coalition representing all segments of society, serving as a neutral dialogic space and supportive environment for official mechanisms (reinforcing and complementing formal conflict-resolution systems with alternative community-based mechanisms).

- Designing reconciliation programs that are tailored to the specificities and culture of the new context and grounded in evidence, rather than replicating the Al-Sarari experience verbatim.
- Adopting a gradual approach that begins with simple, concrete steps (such as a joint service project) to build trust before engaging controversial issues such as blood feuds and land disputes.

Fourth: Conditions for Success and Sustainability

- **Genuine Willingness for Reconciliation:** There must be sincere intent among key actors, along with explicit support from higher-level or local authorities.
- **Neutralizing Spoilers:** Success requires identifying actors who benefit from the continuation of conflict and developing clear strategies either to isolate them or to engage them under explicit conditions that incentivize a shift toward supporting peace.
- **Flexibility and Contextualization:** The model must be understood as a flexible framework rather than a “fixed formula,” requiring continual adjustment to fit local specificities.
- **Ensuring Resources and Continuity:** One of the greatest challenges is securing long-term funding to implement the different stages of the solution, and avoiding reliance on short-term projects that fail to generate sustainable impact.
- **Documentation and Experience-Sharing:** Systematically documenting the experience and encouraging exchange visits and peer learning among community leaders from different areas to strengthen horizontal learning and build a national knowledge base on local peacebuilding.

The strength and professional rigor of this model lie in shifting the focus from the specific details of the Al-Sarari conflict to the underlying processes and methodological mechanisms that can be detached from the geographic context and transferred and adapted elsewhere – turning it into an effective tool for peacebuilding in complex environments.

CONCLUSION

Main Findings

The Al-Sarari crisis reveals a dangerous pattern in which historically and socially rooted local disputes are transformed into destructive proxy wars when they intersect with a nationwide conflict. This paper has demonstrated that the collapse of state authority, sectarian polarization, and economic deterioration together formed a “deadly triangle” that dismantled the village’s social fabric.

It has also shown that military solutions and superficial traditional mediations are bound to fail because they ignore root causes and accumulated grievances. The impacts extended far beyond physical destruction to encompass the collapse of value systems and the poisoning of collective memory—making recovery a complex challenge that goes well beyond reconstruction.

Integrating community dialogue outcomes with strategic analysis confirms that the path to peace in Al-Sarari necessarily passes through bottom-up restorative justice. The local community has clearly articulated that peace is not merely the silence of guns, but a sense of safety over property, the existence of a safe road, a functioning health center nearby, and a fair opportunity in life.

The gap between political analysis and community needs can only be bridged through local mechanisms such as the “community committee,” which ensures that solutions are grounded in reality and genuinely owned by those most affected.

Future Outlook

Despite the depth of the wounds, hope lies at the heart of the community itself. War fatigue, the broad societal preference for reconciliation, and the presence of local peace actors all represent real opportunities on which to build.

The desired future for Al-Sarari is not a mere return to the pre-2015 status quo, but the construction of a new and more resilient reality—one based on: Restorative justice that addresses past grievances; Participatory development that builds shared interests for the future; and local governance that ensures the crisis is not repeated. If Al-Sarari can successfully transition from a “flashpoint of tension” to a “model of recovery,” this will not only transform a single village but provide an inspiring roadmap for other Yemeni communities torn apart by similar conflicts.

The aspirations for Al-Sarari’s future are now clearer and more actionable. They are not limited to “peace” in the abstract, but to the construction of a just and sustainable peace: a future in which land issues are resolved fairly; basic services are restored; and youth and women are able to contribute to building a vibrant local economy. The success of this model – which combines local leadership with external support aligned to community priorities – would not only mark a turning point for Al-Sarari, but would also offer a practical guide and adaptable methodology demonstrating that peace in Yemen can and must be built from the bottom up.



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POLICY PAPER

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Model in the Village of Al-Sarrari –
Toward a Roadmap for Restorative
Justice and Community-Led
Peacebuilding

Prepared by:
Abdulghani Al-Hiagem
Researcher in Peacebuilding
and Human Rights



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