

Impact of small health investments: Improving the infrastructure and quality of reproductive health services in Yemen

Main lessons learned from Concern Worldwide's programme funded by Electric Aid.

Context

After 10 years of war, Yemen remains one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. With the Civil war increasing unemployment, hunger, and insecurity for civilians, nearly 80% of the country's population is below the poverty line and more than 55% in need of some form of humanitarian assistance. In total, 19.5 million people are in dire need of humanitarian assistance and protection services, including 15 million women and children, and over 2.3 million children urgently need treatment for acute malnutrition.

Maternal mortality rates in Yemen remain alarmingly high, with one woman dying in childbirth every 2 hours, predominantly from entirely preventable causes¹. According to the UNFPA and the ACAPS Thematic Report 2025² at least 5.5 million women and girls of childbearing age require sexual reproductive health services across the country, their lives at risk from pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum-related complications. The gender dynamics in Yemen and cultural constraints significantly hinder access to reproductive health services in Yemen, as mobility restrictions and strict gender norms require women to be treated by female doctors, who are scarce, especially in rural areas. These cultural barriers intersect with other challenges, such as limited infrastructure and the lack of safe or private space in health facilities, contributing to the severe underutilization and low availability of reproductive health services for Yemeni women and girls.

Programme Overview

Yemen has extremely poor health indicators with high levels of malnutrition, low immunization rates, and outbreaks of communicable diseases. The fragile health system is suffering from the consequences of protracted conflict, economic decline, and limited government resources.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Concern has been providing health and nutrition services to Alroaid health unit in the Al-Millah district in Lahj Governorate, an area currently facing extremely high malnutrition rates, as well as recurrent cholera and measles outbreaks. At the beginning of 2024, when Concern started operations, the health unit reported challenges in delivering basic services due to a lack of basic health infrastructure, a lack of handwashing facilities and medical waste disposal (presenting significant health risks to patients, healthcare workers and the environment). The health unit was also struggling with limited space with no waiting area for female patients and medical supplies were being stored in a latrine built for people with disabilities. Patients often had to wait outside of

¹ [2023 unfpa yemen humanitarian response brochure - english .pdf](#)

² [ACAPS Thematic report - Yemen: Access to reproductive health for women and girls \(23 January 2025\) - Yemen | ReliefWeb](#)

Concern Worldwide Yemen: Impact of Small Health Investments

the facility before receiving treatment, with the lack of privacy posing as a significant challenge for women and girls, especially in relation to reproductive health services.

With funding from Electric Aid, the programme has improved the quality of health care services at Alroaid health unit through targeted infrastructure development as well as the provision of essential equipment and tools necessary for routine operations. Concern supported with the construction of an additional room to be used as a space to deliver reproductive health services for women and girls, with an integrated latrine and handwashing stations ensuring privacy and improved hygiene and Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) measures for women visiting health facilities for antenatal care, deliveries, postnatal care and family planning services. The design of the room was jointly prepared by an engineer from the Ministry of Health, incorporating feedback from both facility staff and the community.

An additional but essential component of Concern's intervention was the provision of equipment and furniture aimed at improving service quality, patient comfort, and dignity. Visitor seats were provided, and the Reproductive Health room was equipped with shelves for the safe storage of medical supplies and health records. Additional items including a delivery bed, privacy curtains and a wheelchair for persons with disabilities were provided to ensure safe and equitable access to services for all.

Implementation Steps

1. **Planning and Site Assessment:** A detailed bill of quantities and drawings for the construction of an additional room were compiled by Concern and the Ministry of Health. An agreement was then signed with the landowner (community leader) who donated land for the additional room to be constructed adjacent to the targeted health facility. The activities were carefully planned, and the available budget was discussed with the Ministry of Health and the District Health Office to ensure the best use of limited resources to complement the ongoing programme and promote sustainable impact.
2. **Procurement:** A contractor was selected through a competitive bidding process for the construction of the Reproductive Health room whilst equipment and furniture, such as a delivery bed, a wheelchair, steel chairs, and shelves, were procured from Concern's pre-qualified supplier. The procurement of these items from tested and Concern's pre-qualified suppliers ensured the timely delivery of quality items to the health facility.
3. **Construction:** A detailed contract and scope of work was signed with the contractor before the site was handed over in the presence of the health facility manager and Ministry of Health. Routine monitoring visits were subsequently conducted by Concern and the District Health Officer. The construction work was completed within 45 days.
4. **Water and Sanitation:** Two handwashing stations, one latrine, and one water tank connected to the existing water supply line in the targeted health facility were installed by the same contractor.
5. **Equipment Installation:** Upon completion of the construction, the equipment and furniture, including seats, shelves, a delivery bed, and privacy curtains, were installed.
6. **Maintenance and Final Installation:** The facility's internal electrical system was inspected and repaired to ensure the safe operation of lights. Two 400AH lead-acid batteries were installed, along with a solar inverter to enhance electricity service in the room.
7. **Site handover:** The project was officially handed over to the Health Facility Manager at Alroaid health unit in the presence of a representative from the community and the Ministry of Health. As this intervention was part of Concern's health programme at the facility, services began immediately.

Impact

Concern's intervention in Alroaid has had a transformative impact on healthcare delivery, with outcomes extending beyond the initial scope of reproductive health. Despite a relatively small investment of £12,000, the results have been wide-reaching, directly contributing to improved health outcomes, increased service uptake, and better working conditions for healthcare providers.

Improved Access to Quality Reproductive Health Services: The construction of a dedicated Reproductive Health room has provided a safe, private, and dignified environment for women to access essential services, including antenatal care, deliveries, and family planning. This has led to increased attendance for maternal and reproductive health services; improved community trust in the health system and reduced waiting times and overcrowding.

Strengthened Overall Service Delivery: The additional space and new equipment have improved reproductive health services and improved the efficiency of the Outpatients Department (OPD), with better patient flow and reduced congestion; enabled the safe and hygienic treatment of malnutrition, particularly in vulnerable children and ensured secure storage of medicines and proper maintenance of health records, reducing stock loss and improving patient data management.

Alignment with National and International Standards: By expanding the facility's capacity, Alroaid health unit is now able to deliver a comprehensive package of essential health services in line with World Health Organization (WHO) and Ministry of Health guidelines.

Equity and Inclusion: Women and children are now able to access and receive services in a dignified, safe, and inclusive setting, addressing long-standing barriers to care.

Since operations began a total of 100 antenatal care visits, 126 family planning sessions and 7 skilled deliveries were conducted, contributing to improved maternal health services and a reduction in maternal and infant mortality rates in the target area. The number is expected to increase as more people know and share their experience in wider community, which will contribute to improved maternal health services and reduction in maternal and infant mortality rates in the target area.



The midwife provides health consultations at Alroaid health unit. Photo: Ammar Khalaf/Concern Worldwide.



The Reproductive Health room constructed by Concern in the Alroaid health unit, Lahj Governorate, Yemen. Photo: Ammar Khalaf/Concern Worldwide.

Challenges

Concern's ongoing programmes, presence, and established relationship with stakeholders in Al-Millah district ensured the smooth implementation of intended activities. The project was implemented in a rural area with no functional market and difficulty in obtaining skilled labour; therefore, an experienced contractor with previous experience of working in the target area was selected through a competitive bidding process. The contractor managed skilled labour from Aden and Lahj markets, and Concern engaged a site supervisor for daily site monitoring and supervision during critical stages of construction work, supported by a Concern WASH and Shelter engineer.

Reproductive health remains a taboo subject in Yemen, where cultural and social norms limit open discussion and access to services, creating barriers for women and girls. However, acceptance is gradually improving in some communities through careful engagement and providing safe, private and dignified space. The dedicated reproductive health room constructed by Concern in Alroaid health unit contributes to increasing uptake of reproductive health services. In addition, Concern coordinated with the Ministry of Health to appoint a midwife (female) and now providing reproductive health services in newly constructed reproductive health room in Alroaid health unit.

Lessons Learned

Engagement with the Ministry of Health, health unit staff and community from the offset of the project ensured smooth implementation and local ownership. Constant communication assisted in gaining community support, with a local leader donating the land in front of the existing health facility for the construction of an additional room for the health facility. A feasibility assessment was conducted in collaboration with the community, health workers, and the Ministry of Health engineer, which helped in necessary adaptations in the design and drawings of the room for better utilisation of the available limited land. Support from the Ministry of Health assisted Concern and the health unit in ensuring the new room would indeed be used for critical reproductive health services in a safe and dignified space that aligns with cultural norms.

Integration with Concern's ongoing health and nutrition services allowed for the £12,000 to be sufficient funding to achieve Electric Aid's aims. If it has been a standalone programme the investment would have needed to be significantly more. Concern's ongoing programme in Alroaid contributed to cost sharing in terms of staff, transport, operations and monitoring.

Basic services are a necessity as an infrastructure without water, sanitation, furniture and equipment will not function at full capacity and deliver intended results. Therefore, the investment from Electric Aid was carefully planned and savings from different budget lines were strategically used to integrate WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) services and provide essential equipment, creating a more comprehensive support and enabling the start of the reproductive health services immediately upon completion of the construction.

Conclusion

The project successfully strengthened the capacity and quality of healthcare services at Alroaid health unit, particularly for women and children, through targeted infrastructure improvements, provision of essential equipment, and enhanced WASH facilities. The dedicated reproductive health room has created a safe, private, and dignified space for maternal and family health services, leading to increased service uptake and improved health outcomes. By effectively engaging the community, Ministry of Health, and local stakeholders, the project demonstrated that a relatively small investment can deliver a significant and sustainable impact on the health and well-being of a vulnerable rural population. The new reproductive health room is a strong example of how a modest investment can deliver a major impact. With just €12,000, a safe and private space was created where women and girls can now access essential maternal and newborn care, skilled deliveries, and family planning services. This small investment is already saving lives, restoring dignity, and strengthening community health, proving that even limited resources,

proving that even limited resources, when well-placed, can drive lasting change for vulnerable families in Yemen.

Testimonials

"I gave birth to twins by surgery in the hospital in town, but I visit the midwife in this facility for my postnatal care to check the growth of the infants and my own health; I am receiving counselling for breastfeeding, and family planning medications. Now that there is enough space and privacy, we feel comfortable talking to the midwife to discuss problems and family planning issues." **Alveera*, mother of a twins.**

"Previously before my son was born, I gave birth to a premature girl baby in the hospital in town. She only lived for 6 days before passing away. I am pregnant again with for a third time but due to the past situation, I'm worried about my baby's health as well as my own.

However, I am very happy with the new building, at least I can visit for routine check-ups and medications, and if needed, I can go early to the hospital for a premature delivery; the midwife will guide me. The facility has been improved, with sufficient space, a delivery bed and seating for waiting, which provides us with privacy and comfort to discuss our health issues with the midwife." **Feeha*, 17 years old, mother to one child and currently pregnant.**

"There is now more space, and it is clean, there is even a toilet inside the building. The facility is near my home, and I am visiting this facility regularly for my health check-ups. Previously, privacy issues hindered us from visiting the facility. Now I don't have to go to the hospital in town, which we cannot afford. The midwife provides health consultations, medicines, health awareness, and checks my nutrition. We request more medications for emergency obstetric and newborn care." **Amina*, 27 years old, mother to one child and currently pregnant.**

"There was no separate room for reproductive health services and no safe and private space for antenatal and postnatal care, skilled deliveries and family planning. The maternal mortality rate is already very high in Yemen, especially in rural areas. Many women and girls were hesitant to visit the health clinic due to limited safe space for them". **Manager of Alroaid's health unit.**

"Many women and babies have died due to the lack of reproductive health services. Women and girls now feel safe visiting the clinic for critical antenatal and postnatal care, skilled deliveries, and family planning. Many women are now coming for the check-up and deliveries, and I can now discuss maternal health issues and family planning matters with them". **Midwife at Alroaid's health unit.**



The midwife provides health consultations at Alroaid health unit. Photo: Ammar Khalaf/Concern Worldwide.



Concern's Health and Nutrition Officer and the Alroaid health unit midwife. Photo: Ammar Khalaf/ Concern Worldwide.

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