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Saudi Humanitarian Diplomacy in Yemen (2025–2015)

Roles, Approaches, and Impact

Study



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Study

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We are a research institution concerned with studying Yemeni affairs and the regional and international influences on it. Through interpreting history, analysing the present, and predicting the future, in the aim of positive participating for better future of Yemen

Executive Summary

This study examines the role of Saudi Arabia's humanitarian diplomacy in strengthening the humanitarian response in Yemen between 2015 and 2025. It explores its guiding principles and determinants, the nature of humanitarian and development interventions, implementation mechanisms, partnerships, and associated challenges. The study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach and a case study methodology, drawing on United Nations reports, the Financial Tracking Service (FTS), documents from the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSrelief), the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen (SDRPY), and relevant government documents.

The findings show that Saudi humanitarian diplomacy has taken a comprehensive and integrated approach, combining emergency humanitarian response with support for recovery and development. This has involved funding humanitarian sectors and implementing projects in health, education, water, energy, and infrastructure, in partnership with the United Nations, government entities, and local and international organisations. These interventions have helped maintain essential services and strengthen the resilience of local communities despite the challenges posed by the conflict, access constraints, and a complex operating environment.

The study recommends strengthening the integration of humanitarian and development efforts, building institutional capacity, expanding local partnerships, and improving monitoring and evaluation systems to enhance the effectiveness and long-term impact of interventions.

Introduction

The nature of humanitarian crises in the contemporary international environment has shifted as a result of protracted armed conflicts, increasing the need for instruments that extend beyond traditional relief frameworks. In this context, humanitarian diplomacy has emerged as a framework that combines humanitarian principles with diplomatic instruments through negotiation, partnership-building, resource mobilisation, and the facilitation of humanitarian access, contributing to the protection of civilians and greater respect for international humanitarian law.[12]

Régnier (2011) highlights its role in mobilising support and coordinating responses to complex crises, while Slim (2019) emphasises the importance of balancing humanitarian principles with political and security considerations.

Since the Houthi coup in September 2014, Yemen has faced one of the most complex humanitarian crises, as armed conflict has been compounded by institutional collapse and the deterioration of essential services. The effectiveness of the humanitarian response has therefore depended not only on funding but also on the ability of actors to facilitate access, build partnerships, and strengthen coordination.[3]

1. Philippe Régnier, "The Emerging Concept of Humanitarian Diplomacy: Identification of a Community of Practice and Prospects for International Recognition," International Review of the Red Cross 93, no. 884 (2011): 1211–1237, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383112000574.
2. Hugo Slim, "Humanitarian Diplomacy: The ICRC's Neutral and Impartial Advocacy in Armed Conflicts," Ethics & International Affairs 33, no. 1 (2019): 67–77, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0892679418000904.
3. Alistair D. B. Cook and Lina Gong, "Humanitarian Diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific: Part I," Asian Journal of Comparative Politics 6, no. 3 (2021): [Page number cited], https://doi.org/10.1177/20578911211045668.

Between 2015 and 2025, Saudi Arabia emerged as a key actor in Yemen's humanitarian and development response through the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSrelief) and the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen (SDRPY), reflecting an approach that combines emergency response with support for recovery and the rehabilitation of vital sectors.

Despite the scale of Saudi interventions, most of the existing literature focuses on describing aid or assessing it at the sectoral level. Few studies have examined Saudi humanitarian diplomacy as an integrated framework encompassing humanitarian, diplomatic, and development dimensions.

Against this background, this study seeks to analyse the role of Saudi Arabia's humanitarian diplomacy in strengthening the humanitarian response and supporting development recovery efforts in Yemen between 2015 and 2025. It draws on official documents and international reports, examines partnership mechanisms and the integration of humanitarian and development interventions, and explores the nature of this role, its institutional mechanisms, and the limits of its impact on humanitarian response and sustainable development.

First: Total Funding Provided in Support of Humanitarian Response Plans (2015–2025)

Table 1. Saudi Arabia's Funding Contributions to Yemen's Humanitarian Response Plans

No.	Year	People Reached (million)	Funding Received for Humanitarian Response Plans (USD billion)	Saudi Contribution to the Response Plan (USD)	Saudi Share of Total Funding
1	2015	8.8	0.89	322,305,356	36.21%
2	2016	10.6	1.03	308,904,625	29.99%
3	2017	10.2	1.76	303,099,287	17.22%
4	2018	13.5	2.51	1,383,026,221	55.10%
5	2019	13.7	3.60	1,323,673,227	36.77%
6	2020	10.0	2.00	474,159,126	23.71%
7	2021	11.6	2.40	1,487,083,861	61.96%
8	2022	10.7	2.20	1,095,773,643	49.81%
9	2023	8.7	1.60	1,369,118,869	85.57%
10	2024	8.0	1.40	1,184,619,541	84.62%
11	2025	5.0	0.70	661,135,379	94.45%
	Total	**—**	**20.09**	**9.91 billion**	**49.34%**

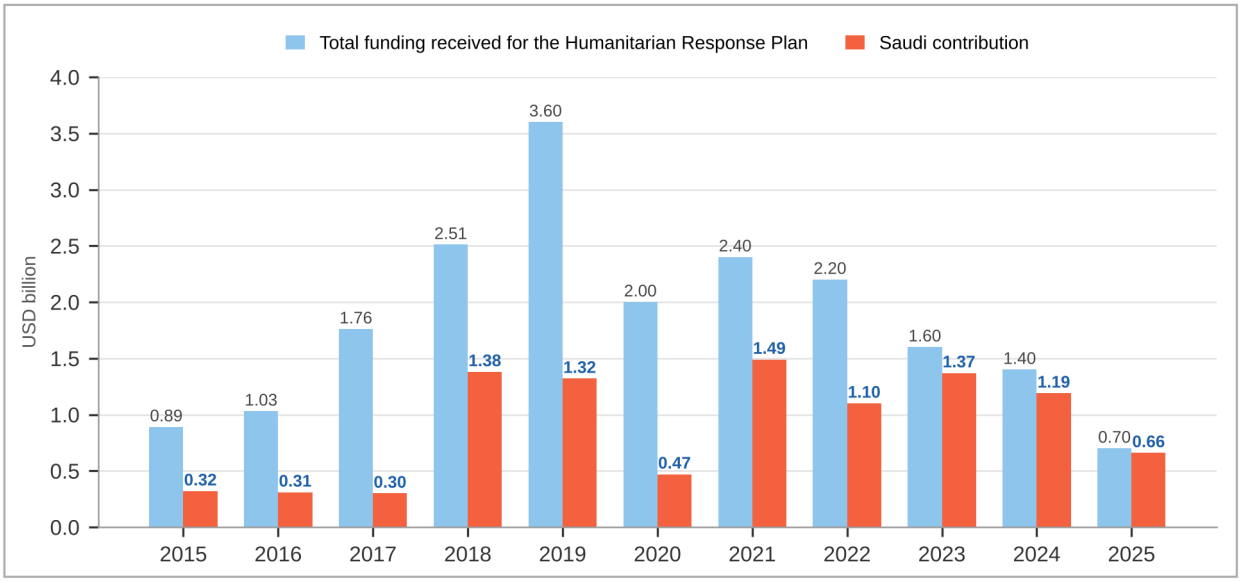
Source: Compiled by the author using reports from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the UN Financial Tracking Service (FTS).[4]

The data in Table 1 show fluctuations in Saudi Arabia's contributions to humanitarian response plans. Its contribution stood at USD 322.3 million in 2015, rose to USD 1.38 billion in 2018, and peaked at USD 1.49 billion in 2021. Despite the decline in funding between 2023 and 2025 amid a broader reduction in international funding, Saudi Arabia's share of total funding rose to 85.57% in 2023, 84.62% in 2024, and 94.45% in 2025.

4. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2025). Financial Tracking Service (FTS): Yemen humanitarian response funding. https://fts.unocha.org/

The number of people reached also rose from 8.8 million in 2015 to 13.7 million in 2019, before declining to 5 million in 2025. These findings underscore the continued importance of Saudi Arabia's contribution to funding the humanitarian response. Figure 1 illustrates trends in Saudi funding compared with total funding for the international humanitarian response plan and the funding gap.

Figure (1): A Comparative Analysis of Saudi Financing Pathways and Yemen's Humanitarian Funding Gap (2015–2025)



Second: Saudi Emergency Relief Funding (2015–2025)

Table 2. Saudi Emergency Funding by Humanitarian Sector

No.	Sector	Number of Projects	Total Funding (USD)
1	Food Security and Agriculture	157	1,505,718,029
2	Health	692	1,070,373,536
3	Humanitarian Operations Support and Coordination	30	686,730,232
4	Protection	66	401,359,397
5	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)	56	245,784,602
6	Shelter and Non-Food Items	68	217,018,384
7	Nutrition	17	167,782,702
8	Multi-Sector	34	148,646,268
9	Education	51	143,593,940
10	Early Recovery	36	136,807,769
11	Logistics	8	45,427,383
12	Emergency Telecommunications	1	16,000,000
13	Charitable Activities	1	6,737
	Total	**1,217**	**4,785,248,979**

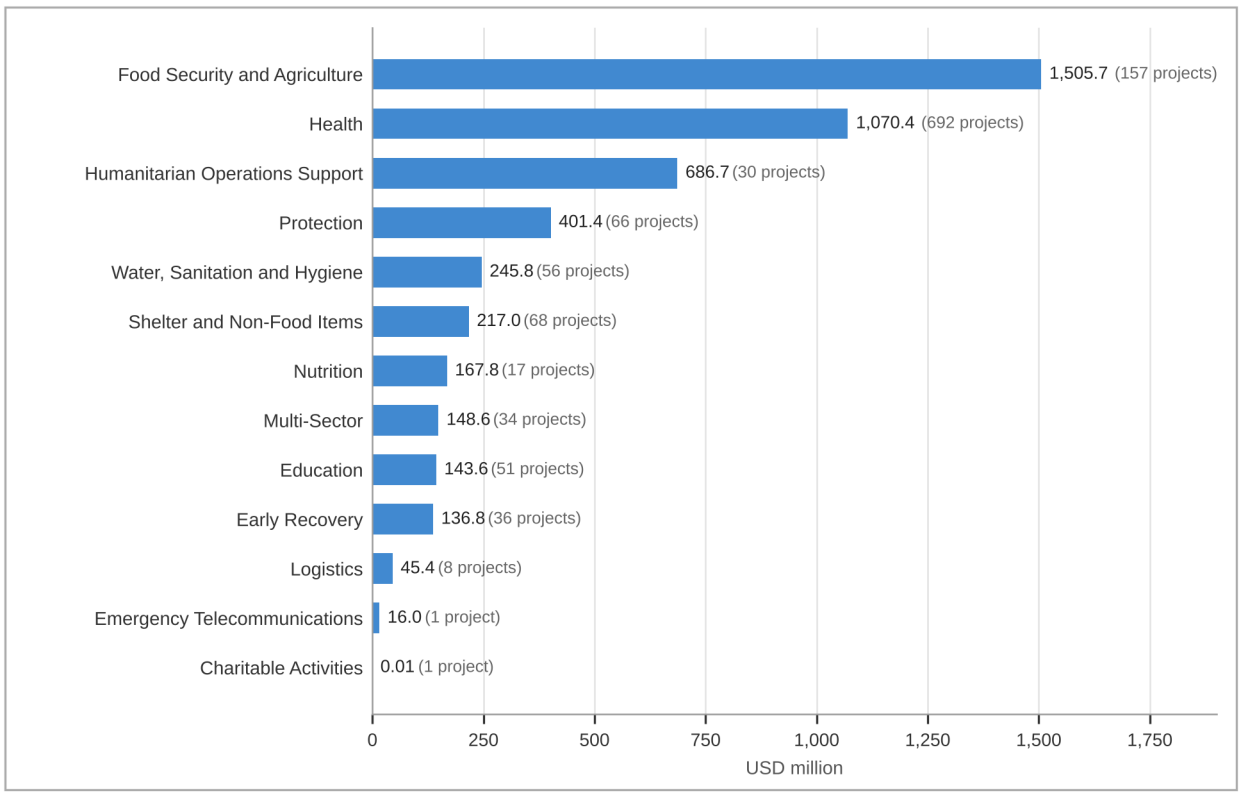
Source: Compiled by the author using data from the UN Financial Tracking Service (FTS) on Saudi contributions to Yemen between 2015 and 2025.[5]

The data show that Saudi humanitarian interventions in Yemen comprised 1,217 projects worth USD 4.79 billion across multiple sectors. Food security and agriculture received the largest share of funding, at USD 1.51 billion across 157 projects, followed by health at USD 1.07 billion. The health sector accounted for the largest number of projects, with 692. Funding for humanitarian operations support and coordination amounted to USD 686.7 million across 30 projects.

5. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2025). Financial Tracking Service (FTS): Yemen humanitarian response funding. https://fts.unocha.org/

Other interventions covered protection, water and sanitation, shelter, nutrition, education, and early recovery, while logistics, emergency telecommunications, and charitable activities received the lowest levels of funding. The data indicate that funding prioritised life-saving sectors while covering a range of humanitarian needs. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of funding and projects. The author emphasises that the USD 4.79 billion recorded by FTS represents sector-specific funding for humanitarian projects and forms part of the USD 9.91 billion in total Saudi support for humanitarian response plans presented in Table 1. The difference comprises direct humanitarian and financial support, as well as funding not classified by sector. This distinction avoids double counting when calculating the total value of Saudi interventions, which amounts to approximately USD 22 billion.

Figure (2): Distribution of Saudi Financing by Humanitarian Sector and Number of Projects (2015–2025)



Third: Saudi Funding for Sustainable Development (2015–2025)

Table 3. Interventions by the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen (SDRPY), 2018–2025[6]

	Year	Value/Achievement	Key Interventions
1	2018	Implementation of infrastructure and basic service projects began.	Establishment of the programme and launch of its first projects.
2	2019	Expansion across several Yemeni governorates.	Expansion of education, health, transport, and energy projects.
3	2020	Continued project implementation despite the COVID-19 pandemic.	Water, electricity, and road projects.
4	2021	Training of government personnel and improvement of institutional performance.	Launch of the institutional capacity-building programme.
5	2022	Increase in the number of projects across various governorates.	Expansion across the eight development sectors.
6	2023	Continued implementation of infrastructure and service projects.	Integration of development and economic recovery efforts.
7	2024	Implementation of development projects alongside economic support programmes.	Expansion of projects and alignment with efforts to support economic stability.
8	2025	Total project value exceeded USD 1 billion across eight development sectors.	The programme reached 268 projects and initiatives.

No.	Indicator	Value
1	Number of Projects and Initiatives	268 projects and initiatives
2	Total Value	Over USD 12 billion
3	Sectors	Eight development sectors
4	Geographic Coverage	Most Yemeni governorates
5	Partners	Yemeni government, local authorities, United Nations organisations, civil society, and the private sector

Source: Compiled by the author using data from the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen, Project Database – Republic of Yemen.

6. Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen (2025). Reports and Achievements. https://sdrpy.gov.sa

The data in Table 3 indicate that the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen is one of the principal instruments of Saudi development intervention. By 2025, the programme had implemented 268 projects and initiatives worth over USD 12 billion across eight development sectors in most Yemeni governorates, in partnership with the Yemeni government, local authorities, the United Nations, and civil society organisations.

The data also show how the programme has evolved since its establishment in 2018, moving from a focus on rehabilitating infrastructure and basic services towards an integrated development approach encompassing education, health, energy, water, transport, institutional capacity-building, and support for economic recovery and stability. This reflects the focus of Saudi interventions on vital sectors and on advancing recovery and sustainable development in Yemen.

Fourth: Key Local Partners in Saudi Interventions in Yemen (2015–2025)

Table 4. Key Local Partners in the Implementation of Saudi Interventions in Yemen (2015–2025)[7]

	Local Organisation	Humanitarian Activities	Partnership Period	Governorates of Implementation	Sectors of Intervention
1	Human Access	Implementation of Eid al-Adha sacrifice, Zakat al-Fitr, shelter, and water projects.	2016–2025	Marib, Hadramout, Al-Mahra, Al-Hodeidah, Aden	Food security, seasonal relief, shelter, protection, water, and health
2	Taybah Foundation for Development	Water, health, Iftar, and mobile clinic projects.	2018–2025	Hajjah, Al-Hodeidah, Sana'a (Nihm), Marib, Aden, Taiz, Abyan, Lahj, Shabwa, Hadramout, and others	Health, water, sanitation and hygiene, nutrition, camps, and emergency relief
3	Benevolence Coalition for Humanitarian Relief (BCHR)	Food security, agriculture, and shelter projects.	2021–2025	Al-Hodeidah, Hajjah, Marib, Al-Jawf, Al-Bayda, Hadramout, Shabwa, Al-Mahra, Socotra	Livelihoods, early recovery, protection, and economic empowerment
4	Yamany Foundation for Development and Humanitarian Action	Food security, agriculture, shelter, health, and water projects.	2024–2025	Aden, Lahj, Al-Dhalea, Shabwa, Hadramout, Al-Mahra, and others	Health and capacity-building
5	Selah Foundation for Development	Implementation of training and capacity-building programmes in water and health with support from SDRPY.	2024–2026	Marib, Hadramout	Water and health
6	Estijabah Foundation for Humanitarian and Relief Work	Food security, agriculture, and shelter projects.	2025–2026	Abyan, Marib, Hadramout	Agriculture, food security, and agricultural value chains

7. Social Fund for Development (1997). Background and Objectives. Social Fund for Development – Yemen. https://www.sfd; Benevolence Coalition for Humanitarian Relief (2025). 2024 Annual Report. https://bchr-ye.org/ar/media/issues/show/8; Selah Foundation for Development. Annual Reports. https://selah-ye.org/annual-reports/; Human Access (2025). 2024 Annual Report. https://humanaccess.org/a/m/rel/-التقـارير-التـقرير-السنوي-/السنوية2024; Taybah Foundation for Development. https://taybahye.org/; Yamany Foundation for Development and Humanitarian Action. News. https://yamany.org/; Small and Micro Enterprise Promotion Service (SMEPS) (2025). Annual Report 2024. https://smeps.org.ye/post/85.

	Local Organisation	Humanitarian Activities	Partnership Period	Governorates of Implementation	Sectors of Intervention
7	Small and Micro Enterprise Promotion Service (SMEPS)	Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen (SDRPY).	2024–2025	Several Yemeni governorates	Small enterprises, livelihoods, and entrepreneurship
8	Social Fund for Development (SFD)	Construction and equipping of model schools, establishment of hospitals, health centres, and maternal and child health centres, strengthening the capacity of local institutions, and oversight of project implementation.	2025–2026	Marib, Lahj, Taiz, Al-Dhalea, Shabwa, Abyan, and other governorates depending on the projects	Education, health, infrastructure, local development, and institutional capacity-building

The data in Table 4 indicate that Saudi humanitarian and development interventions have relied on a network of partnerships with local Yemeni organisations to implement projects across various governorates. The Benevolence Coalition for Humanitarian Relief and the Taybah Foundation for Development emerged as key local partners, given the diversity of their interventions and the broad scope of their humanitarian and development projects.

The Yamany Foundation for Development and Humanitarian Action and the Selah Foundation for Development played prominent roles in implementing capacity-building programmes and development projects. Human Access and the Benevolence Coalition for Humanitarian Relief contributed to numerous food security, seasonal relief, shelter, and water projects, while the Estijabah Foundation for Humanitarian and Relief Work implemented specialised projects in agriculture, food security, and agricultural value chains.

The Small and Micro Enterprise Promotion Service (SMEPS) also participated in implementing economic empowerment programmes and supporting small enterprises. This reflects the diversity of Saudi partnerships with local organisations, based on their respective areas of specialisation and expertise.

Fifth: Summary of Saudi Emergency Relief and Development Funding and Interventions in Yemen (2015–2025)

Table 5. Summary of Total Saudi Funding and Interventions in Yemen (2015–2025)

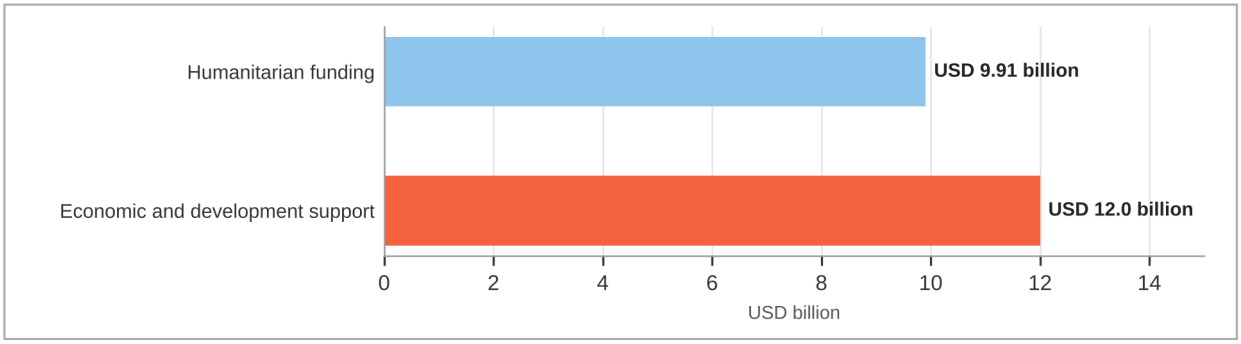
No.	Area of Support	Value
1	Humanitarian Funding	USD 9.9 billion
2	Economic and Development Support	USD 12 billion
	Total	**USD 21.9 billion**

Source: Compiled by the author based on the aggregate data presented in the preceding tables.

The data in Table 5 show the comprehensive nature of Saudi support for Yemen, which centred on three main areas: humanitarian funding amounting to approximately USD 9.9 billion, economic and development support exceeding USD 12 billion, and the implementation of 268 development projects across eight vital sectors. This reflects an integrated approach combining humanitarian response, economic support, and sustainable development.

Based on official data, the total value of Saudi interventions is estimated at approximately USD 22 billion. Given the potential overlap between some components of this support, the figure should be regarded as an indication of the scale of interventions rather than a financial total free of double counting. Figure 3 illustrates how these interventions complement one another and contribute to limiting the deterioration of humanitarian conditions and strengthening the resilience of vital sectors in Yemen.

Figure (3): Components of Total Saudi Interventions (Humanitarian and Development) in Yemen (2015–2025)



Sixth: Comparative Analysis of Saudi Interventions and Those of Other Major Donors (2015–2025)

Table 6. Scale of Saudi Interventions Compared with Other Major International Donors to Yemen

No.	Donor	Estimated Contribution	Main Areas and Sectors of Intervention
1	Saudi Arabia	Approximately USD 22 billion	Emergency assistance, food security, health and nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, shelter and non-food items, protection projects, electricity and energy, infrastructure rehabilitation, support for the Yemeni economy, financial deposits and grants, and reconstruction projects.
2	United Arab Emirates	USD 6.6 billion	Food security, relief assistance, health, water, electricity and energy, infrastructure support, and rehabilitation of service facilities.
3	United States	USD 7 billion	Food security and food assistance, health, water and sanitation, protection, refugee support, and nutrition.
4	European Union	EUR 2–3 billion	Humanitarian assistance, food security, health, protection, water, sanitation and hygiene, and early recovery projects.
5	United Kingdom	GBP 1.5–2 billion	Food security, health, protection, support for women and the most vulnerable groups, and water and sanitation.
6	Germany	EUR 1.5–2 billion	Food security, water, education, health, protection, resilience-building, and support for development programmes.
7	Kuwait	Over USD 2 billion	Humanitarian assistance, food, health, education, water, development projects, and support for the rehabilitation of selected service sectors.
8	Sweden	USD 0.5–0.7 billion	Protection, food security, health, support for women and children, and empowerment and resilience-building projects.
9	Netherlands	USD 0.4–0.6 billion	Food security, water, sanitation and hygiene, protection, human rights support, and long-term humanitarian programmes.

Source: Compiled by the author using data from official government aid platforms, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' Financial Tracking Service (OCHA FTS), and reports from international humanitarian agencies.[8]

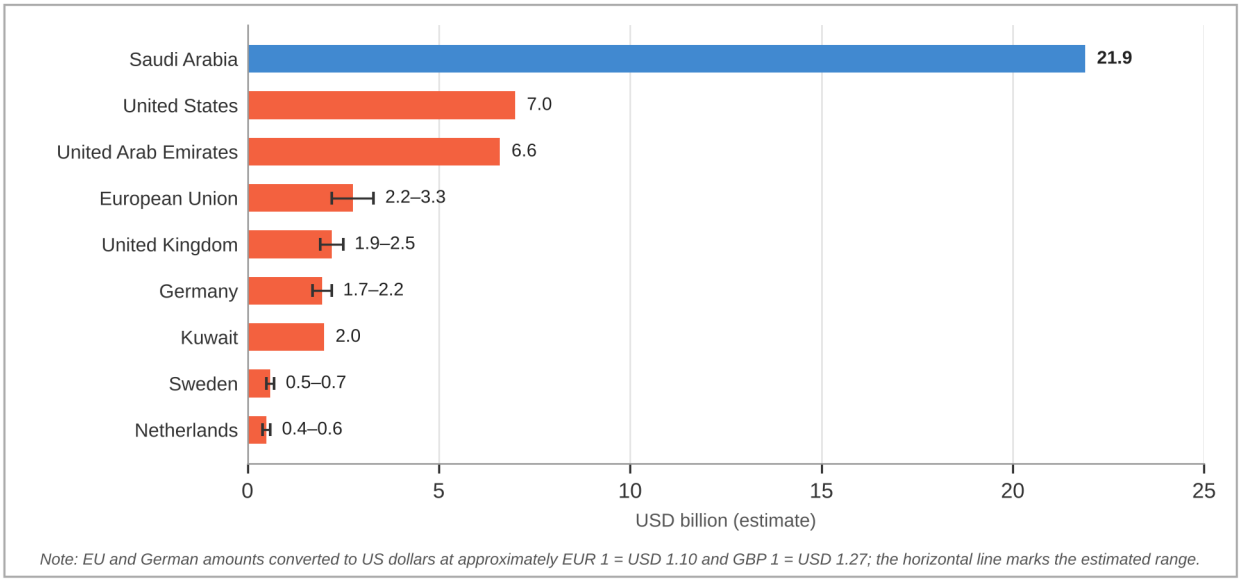
Table 6 highlights the diversity of funding and intervention approaches in the international and regional response to the Yemeni crisis between 2015 and 2025.

8. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2025). Financial Tracking Service (FTS): Yemen humanitarian response funding. https://fts.unocha.org/

It reveals clear differences between donor models. Saudi Arabia led in terms of overall support, with contributions extending beyond humanitarian assistance to development, economic support, and reconstruction, whereas most other donors focused on humanitarian funding. The United Arab Emirates and Kuwait also represented a regional approach combining relief and development. The United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and Germany were the leading Western donors supporting humanitarian response plans through the United Nations and international organisations. Sweden and the Netherlands focused on specific areas, including protection, human rights, and community resilience.

The comparison shows that differences between donors extend beyond the volume of funding to the nature of their interventions. Some combined relief, recovery, and development, while others focused exclusively on emergency response. Figure 4 presents an estimated comparison of contributions by Yemen's major donors over the same period.

Figure (4): Comparative Estimates of the Scale of Major Donors' Contributions to Yemen (2015–2025)



Note: EU and German amounts converted to US dollars at approximately EUR 1 = USD 1.10 and GBP 1 = USD 1.27; the horizontal line marks the estimated range.

Key Findings

The study reached the following key findings:

1. Saudi humanitarian diplomacy in Yemen between 2015 and 2025 followed a phased approach that combined emergency response, recovery, development, and partnership-building, moving between addressing immediate needs and supporting recovery and stability.

2. Saudi interventions were broad in both sectoral and institutional scope, covering food security and agriculture, health and nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, shelter, education, protection, and early recovery.

3. The establishment of the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSrelief) and the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen (SDRPY) helped institutionalise Saudi interventions, develop planning, implementation, and monitoring mechanisms, and strengthen partnerships with the Yemeni government, the United Nations, and international and local organisations.

4. Saudi Arabia emerged as the largest contributor to Yemen's humanitarian response, with total contributions approaching USD 22 billion, alongside an expansion of its interventions in infrastructure, energy, health, education, water, transport, and capacity-building.

5. Saudi humanitarian diplomacy in Yemen expanded beyond emergency relief to encompass recovery, development, and diplomatic and political engagement. This included proposing initiatives, contributing to mediation efforts, hosting conferences and dialogues aimed at advancing a political settlement and peace, and supporting UN-led efforts to de-escalate the conflict and resume the political process. This reflects the interconnected humanitarian, development, and diplomatic dimensions of the Saudi response.

Recommendations

1. To the Saudi Government

1. Strengthen humanitarian interventions in Yemen by integrating relief, recovery, and development efforts, establishing priorities and indicators to measure impact and sustainability, and standardising data and coordination, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms across Saudi institutions and their partners.
2. Expand investment in livelihoods and local capacity-building programmes by strengthening partnerships with qualified Yemeni institutions and organisations in the design and implementation of sustainable programmes. This would support economic and community resilience, reduce dependence on short-term assistance, and sustain the outcomes of interventions.

2. To the Yemeni Government

1. Develop national recovery and reconstruction plans, align humanitarian and development interventions with national priorities, and direct donor contributions towards the most pressing needs and priorities.
2. Strengthen governance and institutional coordination by standardising databases, needs assessment mechanisms, and information-sharing processes, enhancing transparency and accountability, and expanding the role of local authorities in planning and implementation.

3. To Yemeni Organisations

Improve institutional performance and strengthen partnerships, coordination, and community participation, while developing systems for planning, monitoring, evaluation, impact assessment, transparency, and accountability.

Conclusion

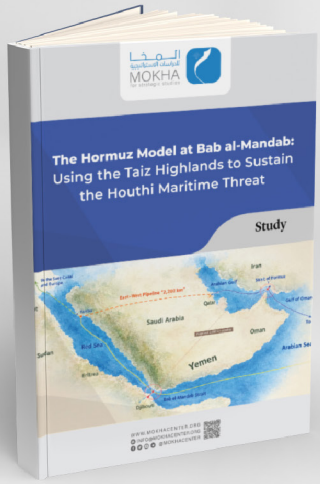
Saudi Arabia's experience in Yemen demonstrates an integrated institutional model of humanitarian diplomacy, reflected in the complementary roles of the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre and the Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen. This has made it possible to combine a rapid response to emergency humanitarian needs with support for recovery, development, and local capacity-building.

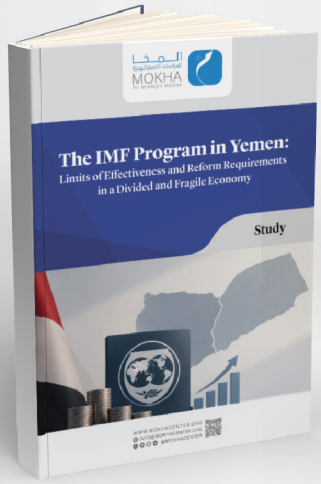
The Saudi experience also reflects the practical application of the Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) Nexus through the integration of humanitarian assistance, infrastructure rehabilitation, and support for institutions and essential services. This role has extended into the diplomatic and political spheres through support for peace efforts, mediation, and initiatives aimed at strengthening stability. Saudi humanitarian diplomacy has thus moved beyond direct relief provision to the use of aid and partnerships as instruments for supporting recovery and stability.

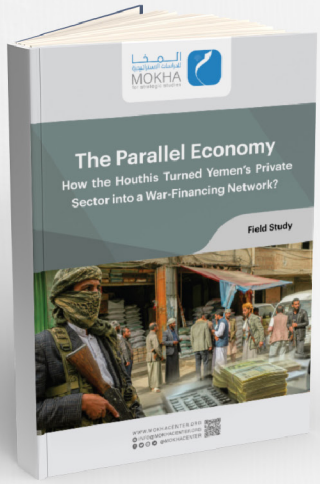
The sustainability of these outcomes, however, depends on the ability of interventions to move gradually from emergency response towards a sustainable development partnership that empowers local institutions, improves their performance, and strengthens their capacity to preserve existing gains and translate external support into lasting impact.

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