I have been involved in emergency response work for the WHO since 2013, and have been stationed in Yemen since 2017. In Yemen, I work as a Project Management Officer on the Emergency Health and Nutrition Project (EHNP), which, in partnership with the World Bank and UNICEF, supports the provision of Health and Nutrition Services in health facilities, while simultaneously protecting the health system in Yemen from collapse so future generations can benefit from it.

My day-to-day work in Yemen involves general follow-up of our activities as a team, in particular, we are working to ensure that health facilities are able to remain open and functional, that people get the help they need in the right place at the right time—we have worked to increase health care access and available services. This is the world’s largest humanitarian
WHO EMRO  |  #womenhumanitarians: celebrating World Humanitarian Day in Yemen

I have visited some of the most difficult places in this country, and it has helped me understand the enormous challenges that Yemenis face daily to access healthcare. The facilities we were remote, necessitating people to travel very long distances across unpaved roads, mountainous ranges and dangerous paths in order to access them. I have the utmost respect for doctors, nurses, and other workers on the frontlines—they are the real heroes in all of this.

The EHNP is a huge project. I think one of our greatest successes is that we have been able to protect the health system from total collapse. Since the Project began, we have seen a huge increase in utilization in the district-level hospitals we support. These hospitals are located in very difficult and far-flung areas; and by strengthening them with equipment, medicines and supplies we ensure they stay open and functional, we are helping to bring healthcare to the local levels in order to reach some of the most vulnerable populations. None of this would be possible, of course, without the World Bank-IDA, whose financial contribution and technical partnership have allowed us to deliver critically needed care to the Yemeni population.

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Hanan Ishaq

Being a humanitarian stems from our innate nature as humans. I believe that contributing to the betterment of others validates and promotes us. I first joined the humanitarian family in 2016. Both the challenges and the sense of gratitude are what gave me a greater sense purpose, enriching me on multiple levels.

In such a critical field of work, we go through both dark moments and moments of hope. One of the darkest times during my work as a humanitarian was when we encountered a 12-year-old child suffering from renal failure, he was in the final stages of his illness, practically on death’s door, with only his 16-year-old brother beside him. Their parents abandoned them after their divorce, orphaning these two boys. He needed a kidney transplant as soon as possible, but before the team was able to help him—he passed away.
Nevertheless, with the dark, come moments of illuminating light and hope. I have met children who were skin and bones, dying of starvation—and these same children unrecognizable after treatment in our stabilization centers (SCs), happier and healthier. Cancer patients who have recovered after receiving treatment through WHO supported hospitals and health facilities in hard to reach areas—their doors kept open in order for them to continuing providing life-saving services to the most vulnerable people in Yemen—my people.

I work in Communications and Media. It takes a myriad of skills to bear the responsibility of documenting and communicating the situation. We are in the field to be the voice to the untold stories of the people. I am proud to be a Yemeni, even prouder to be a female humanitarian worker with the opportunity to capture the stories of my people through image and word. Through the outlet of social media, we are able to provide the world with a glimpse of the health situation and challenges in Yemen.

As a woman in the midst of conflict and the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, I am empowered by being part of the global momentum being pushed by the tidal wave of female strength. As women, we face both unique challenges and experience privileges. I am part of the wider matrix of enabled women. And I know that the force of one woman can affect the collective force of all, to change the world.

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Every person in his/her own capacity is a humanitarian worker. In that context, I realized the importance of my work when I started working in IDP's hosting camp in Pakistan. I saw the women who were forced to stay inside the tents under the scorching heat displaced from their homes due to conflict. They were not able to move freely inside the camp due to cultural restrictions. As a woman, I had the opportunity to engage these women and they opened up expressing their fear of exposure to the external environment. I was motivated to serve the vulnerable IDPs through ensuring provision of adequate WASH services in order to prevent them from water borne diseases. I witnessed the same misfortunes in different contexts while serving in Yemen, responding to the World's largest Cholera outbreak.

I am academically trained water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) specialist currently working in Yemen to support the response to the World’s largest cholera outbreak. I have been working on building the capacities of WASH and health cluster patterns mainly focusing on staff in DTC’s and hospitals who are in frontline response to the cholera outbreak. In addition to developing strategies of water quality surveillance to reduce and prevent morbidity and mortality due to waterborne diseases.
Women’s contribution is remarkable in humanitarian sector due to their God gifted strength and power to manage and cope with difficult situations. I am working in a non-family duty station and working in overwhelming complex situations. However, challenging experiences continue to empowers me. As a young woman with an advisory position in a male dominant society, challenges are many and accepting the role of women in decision-making positions is still frowned upon.

Dr Latifa Abbas Ali

I worked in the field as nutrition coordinator and pediatrician in referral pediatrician hospital for 7 years before I joined WHO on January 2013 as a nutrition field officer.

One of the most difficult and darkest days for me was during the beginning of the war in Yemen in 2015. An 18 month old IDP suffering from severe acute malnutrition, diarrhea and a severe eye infection that evolved into the loss of vision in one eye. Although treatable, but lack of access to specialized health services can cause patients with severe acute malnutrition to lose sight. With only 51% of health facilities still open in Yemen, 19.7 million are in need of healthcare.

Despite the challenges, one thing I keep in mind is that regardless of who we are, small actions have the power to make a big difference, and together we can save the lives of more children despite the humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

We have many success stories. One of them is Bassam. A 10-month old child of a young mother (19 yrs). He arrived to one of WHO’s supported health centers suffering from severe acute malnutrition with severe medical complications. Thanks to specialized services provided by a well-trained health worker, he regained his weight and his health.
I am proud to be part of the efforts that aim towards saving the lives of more children through the delivery of a massive nutrition response, providing technical support and capacity building of health workers, raising awareness of mothers and the community as a whole on nutrition and causing significant change in public behavior.

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