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 Yemen, malnutrition

## **The Food Insecurity that is Starving the People of Yemen**

### Introduction

Yemen is a country in western Asia that is in the midst of a civil war and intense famine. In July 2018, its population was estimated at around 28.7 million people (“The World Factbook”). However, most of these people are in dire need of assistance. Since 2014, Yemen has experienced a severe humanitarian crisis that has involved the government being taken down by a rebel group with the name of the Houthis (Cogan). This caused a massive spread of malnutrition, infections, and government instability in the country. Because of this catastrophe, Yemen is now rated as the poorest country in the Arabian Peninsula, and one of the poorest in the world (FAO Country Programming). It currently over 22 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, which is over 3/4 of the population (“11 Facts”). This is an effect of Saudi Arabia trying to take over and cutting off aid to Yemen while trying to regain the government back to its original form; however, this has only caused more war and destruction to the country. To make matters even worse, many of Yemen’s seaports have been closed. This whole dilemma has many people calling Yemen a national food security crisis. Because Yemen is facing all of these dire circumstances, multiple nonprofits and organizations are trying to support the Yemeni in this time of need.

### Country Overview/Daily Life

Even with Yemen’s rough terrain of scarce arable land and rugged mountains, the Yemeni people still manage to cultivate crops from it. Some common crops grown in Yemen are cereals such as millet, maize, barley and wheat, and cash crops such as cotton, sesame, tobacco, and coffee (“FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security”). Like stated earlier, most farms are small and family owned. This does have a downside, though, because it means fewer employment opportunities for people to work on farms except for family. However, with that being said, agriculture still employs over half the population of Yemen (“Family Farming”). The typical farmer owns a few livestock varieties such as poultry, sheep, or cattle. Besides agriculture, other main sources of income are the fishing industry and oil production companies, especially before the crisis in 2014. The civil war, though, majorly changed the way of living for people. Families who live in Yemen now tend to live in a poor quality house with limiting plumbing and access to clean water due to the entire country currently suffering from a water crisis (“Yemen” [*Encyclopedia Britannica*]). Most households house extended family who all contribute to working on the farm, with the eldest male as the dominant figure in the home. Also, almost all marriages that occur in Yemen are arranged by family. Along with arranged marriages, women are viewed as less than men and view their main priority as bearing children and carrying on the family name (“Yemen” [*Encyclopedia Britannica*]). However, with malnutrition and disease spreading, infant mortality is extremely high in Yemen (“Yemen” [*Countries and Their Cultures*]). This can make doing so more difficult.

Along with that, the majority of the Yemeni population is Islam, so the people practice Islamic practices in their day-to-day life. This includes daily prayers and fasting during Ramadan (“Yemen” [*Countries and Their Cultures*])). Religion is a major aspect of Yemeni’s lives, even in times of war and violence.

### Analyzing Malnutrition and the Impact on Food Security

As stated previously, Yemen is currently undergoing a national food security crisis. Before this issue, agriculture accounted for over half the population’s work, with a little over 3 acres per farmer owner (“Family Farming”). This indicates family farms as the main source of nutrition and income for themselves. However, this disaster majorly reduced field activity for farmers, oil production, and food

availability to people in almost all areas of the country (“Smallholder Agricultural”). With the closing of the ports, one can assume there is also limited access to outside resources that are affordable to the population. With this halt to importing and farming, Yemen is now facing a malnutrition crisis along with a collapse of its health care. Many families have fled their homes because of conflict and war, and they now live in areas with no functioning water or facilities (Madhok). Trends are not improving either. Even despite humanitarian assistance, millions wake up hungry every day. In fact, nearly 3 million babies and mothers are intensely malnourished in this country (“Yemen Emergency”). As they age, the children are 11 times more likely to die younger than children who are healthy (Madhok). Thus, how have other countries been bringing proper aid to the people who are malnourished in Yemen, and how can they improve their assistance?

### Solutions and Recommendations for Yemen

There are multiple countries and organizations trying to help solve the issue of malnutrition in Yemen. This help doesn't just include dropping food off for the suffering either. In this section, I am going to be discussing a few of ways to improve humanitarian assistance in this country that will lead to lowering malnutrition rates and food insecurity.

First off, currently there is a bill passing through the U.S Congress with the idea to limit aid to Saudi Arabia because of the damage the country has done to the Yemeni people, ultimately causing the United States to cut its involvement with the crisis in Yemen drastically (Harb). This has caused quite the controversy to the public, especially earlier in the year when the House of Representatives approved of the bill to be sent to Congress. Some people believe if the U.S cuts its funds to Saudi Arabia, it will cause Saudi Arabia to end the war in Yemen quicker than anticipated. However, it is not a secret that Saudi Arabia is a major customer for weapons for the United States, and some people think this could cause more harm than good for business. I believe, though, that limiting our weapons supplies to Saudi Arabia is the right choice and worth the risk. Saudi Arabia is only causing more destruction and violence in Yemen and, ultimately, adding to the major food insecurity and malnutrition rates in the country. If the U.S cuts off weapons, Saudi Arabia will most likely have to end their support for the war or significantly drop its participation in it. If this happens, Yemen will possibly be able to open its ports that are currently closed. This would allow more access to imported food for families all around the nation which would drastically aid in ending the malnutrition crisis. It also would give opportunities for families to move back to their homes they had to flee from because the violence was too close. Obviously, some people will not have a home to go back to, but if they did, they could get their lives back. Also, it could also give an option for humanitarian assistance to use the ports to bring supplies in order to help with disease and other food issues as well.

Another solution to bring more successful aid into Yemen is to use surveillance and drones in the assistance process. This is not a new concept to the world of humanitarians, but I believe it could be better utilized by more organizations in Yemen. Many countries in battle have multiple ways of surveillance for ongoing wars; technology is constantly expanding. This live footage could at least be used by other organizations who are trying to bring aid to the country, but who are unaware of the specifics of where the violence is. Since a lot of war is already filmed, it would not be a major cost to retrieve the footage. Either the United Nations, The United States, or any first-world country really could help with this in Yemen. If Saudi Arabia is filming parts of the war already, perhaps The United States could make a deal with them to retrieve the live footage for an exchange of certain weapons. If humanitarian workers had the inside scoop on when and where the most violence was located, they could safely and confidently know how to give the people suffering the best assistance. This would lead to fewer casualties for humanitarians, and it would also let the aid workers be more precise on how and where they bring food and assistance to people-- resulting in more successes in saving lives of the Yemeni. This could decrease malnutrition in the long run and temporarily provide safety to the people in Yemen.

The last solution involves bringing in organizations to teach the Yemeni how to grow food at their new homes to obtain the most nutrients as possible. As stated earlier, many people had to flee their homes because of violence, and many moved to the mountains where rough terrain awaited them. If humanitarian aid came to assist these people in the mountains and taught them how to properly grow certain foods that provided as many nutrients as possible for these people to survive, they would have better access to healthy, homegrown food. Many organizations travel to Yemen to give them food, but I believe more should teach the people who are well enough how to grow certain foods on their own to help them survive when the organization leaves. This would require intense research on the type of land the Yemeni are living on and what types of food grow on it. It could also increase the cost of money to organizations for hiring researchers and professionals to help these starving people with farming, but I believe it is worth it in the long run. This plan could go effective almost immediately. Any country or company could participate in this movement. This could increase the chances of people surviving malnutrition after help has to leave.

#### Overview

In conclusion, in order to save the millions of people suffering in Yemen's lives, something needs to improve with assistance in Yemen. Whether that is cutting off U.S weapon supply to Saudi Arabia, utilizing surveillance to aid in organizations, or researching ways to farm better nutrient dense foods, any solution will help. With Yemen being one of the poorest countries in the world, even the smallest improvement would save lives. Food insecurity in Yemen must be a priority. If not, death rates will only keep increasing. People are suffering every day in Yemen because of the civil war taking place. We as other nations have a duty to can help change this crisis to better the lives of the Yemeni.

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