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Yemen, Conflict

Yemen: Hunger in a Divided Nation

Situated in the Middle East, Yemen has for centuries been a culturally rich nation, surrounded by breathtaking landscapes. Nevertheless, Yemeni families have for generations witnessed the steady increase of corruption and tension. Conflict has affected the nation for years, significantly worsening since the eruption of warfare in 2015, which has occurred between the Houthi movement and Yemeni government alongside the Saudi-led coalition. The resulting turmoil has left the nation in what is currently the world's worst humanitarian crisis as conflict has affected Yemen in all aspects of life leaving much of its population food insecure.

Located in the southwestern corner of the Arabian peninsula, Yemen is constitutionally a representative democracy currently led by President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. Geographically much of the landscape consists of mountainous terrain, creating diverse regions. Alongside the highlands it also includes coastal and desert plains, resulting in a varied climate. Generally tropical and arid, altitude is a large factor in weather patterns within the country. For example, while lengthy droughts are common for much of the nation, based on location those in the south are more susceptible compared to the north which receives two rainy seasons (Wenner & Burrowes). These environmental factors have made cultivation difficult with only three percent of the land being arable and around half of it currently in use (Yemen). Despite this, the nation remains predominantly agricultural with much of the work occurring on incredibly small family farms. Statistics from 2019 have shown that while the population was nearing 30 million around 62.727 percent of that continued to be rural (Rural Population % of Total Population). Many of these individuals raise livestock alongside crops such as cereal, vegetables, and fruit to support themselves locally. More lucrative is the cultivation of khat, a chewed stimulant, and coffee whose production remains incredibly important alongside the export of crude oil (Wenner & Burrowes). Overall, agriculture plays an incredibly large role in Yemen, affecting both lifestyle and income.

Homes in Yemen vary by region, with style and material depending on where a family may live. Most homes are multistory, housing large families who typically live with extended members (Wenner & Burrowes). War has left the country's economy shattered and makes imports difficult, resulting in an altered family diet. Typically a regular meal would include a form of meat, vegetable, and bread but over time these meals have become less nutritious or greatly decreased in size (Wenner & Burrowes). Depending on location families may access their food in several ways, during peacetime this was often through markets and subsistence agriculture, but in recent years an increasing number have begun to rely on humanitarian aid shipments. Imports often include gasoline, used by many as fuel to cook food, but shortages and inflated prices have made this a difficult to access commodity. As a result those in poverty often turn to firewood and makeshift stoves, and in some cases have resorted to burning trash (Al-Karimi

& Faisal). As civil unrest continues the Yemeni diet will alter, becoming more dramatic and damaging for the population.

The collapse of Yemen's economy has created an ever-increasing lack of income and access to resources. Joblessness has been driven to great heights with at times 30% of the population being out of work (Wenner & Burrowes). Those who do have jobs often work in agriculture, the sector being the largest employer within the country. Unskilled labor is another common line of work correlating with some of the country's largest and upcoming markets like oil and fishing (Wenner & Burrowes). Lack of education remains an issue in Yemen affecting the job market and availability for much of the country. Many citizens will receive in a day what would be two United States dollars, with the little amount a result of the collapsed economy (Families in Yemen). These workforce trends will likely continue, as few children can attend school despite the country's free education system. War has left it plagued by a lack of resources and improper learning conditions. Similarly, hospitals can no longer support health-related services as sanitation decreases and aid becomes more difficult to facilitate. Consequently, the two systems have become inaccessible in the face of shortages and transportation barriers.

Accessibility of necessities and services has become limited in Yemen, with lack of clean water remaining one of the largest issues. Much of the water within the country is not properly sanitized and continues to further be contaminated by the effects of the war. As a result, many homes lack proper water and plumbing, alongside electricity which much of the nation has no access to (Wenner & Burrowes). Transportation persists but has become difficult due to fuel shortages. While there are major roads connecting living areas, many of these are only accessible by vehicles carrying goods (Wenner & Burrowes). This has cut off many families from markets, acting as another barrier to receiving meals. Rural homes often fall victim to the lack of markets as around fifty percent of households do not have one in their area and are unable to travel (Alles). It should be noted that while many services are unavailable, communication is growing as a result of private phone companies. Cell phones are becoming more common as many individuals gain access to cellular and wireless phones from private distributors (Wenner & Burrowes). In Yemen as a whole, aspects of life considered commonplace in the rest of the world have become incredibly difficult to obtain, affecting food access in the process.

Since 2015, warfare in Yemen has resulted in what is currently the world's worst humanitarian crisis known for shocking numbers of severe malnourishment. Over time these problems have gotten worse with the current status being the poorest the country has ever faced. The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic since mid-2020, have greatly affected the country as supply chains faltered and global prices shifted (The World Bank In Yemen). In general, blows to infrastructure and the economy simultaneously create increases in homelessness and unemployment, consistent contributors to the increasing hunger within the country leaving many families unable to pay for food. Most detrimental at the moment has been the actions taken by both fighting sides to halt humanitarian aid. Over the years Saudi-led forces have blocked aid efforts from bringing life-saving supplies such as food and fuel into the country, with similar trends being seen in Houthi-controlled regions. Both groups continue to drive the nation further into poverty, deliberately barring citizens from accessing daily supplies. This occurs in both urban and rural

areas, as those living in cities face severe infrastructure loss and displacement, with homes and sources of income lost. Rural regions often use land terraces to grow their crops, a generational practice that due to growing conflict has had its structure threatened as they are prone to erosion (Wenner & Burrowes). Artillery fire and landmines shot directly at farmland also disrupt land, crop, and water systems (Al-Basha). Both demographics have had their access to food become blocked as time has gone on contributing to the famine-like conditions.

Within Yemen's patriarchal society, men are often seen as the sole provider, resulting in the loss of work being disastrous for families. While many males are the first to feel the effects of the conflict, statistically women and children have been the hardest hit by malnourishment. Around 1.2 million pregnant or breastfeeding women, as well as 2.3 million children under the age of five currently face acute malnutrition (Yemen Emergency). The two groups have been the hardest hit, followed by the elderly. The immunocompromised demographic has an estimated 1.65 million individuals at risk, yet as a whole continues to receive less relief (The Yemen Crisis ...). Marginalized groups such as the Muhamasheen are also facing greater consequences of the war, as one of the many ethnic groups within the country. Due to a history of poverty and discrimination before the conflict, the group is susceptible to extreme poverty and lack of resources, making them one of the worst-hit groups (Social Policy). While the conflict affects each person eventually, Yemen has proven that food insecurity begins by preying on the most vulnerable causing great loss and suffering.

Environmentally the conflict has affected Yemen in both direct and indirect ways. In general, the agricultural landscape has become impacted by the weapons used in attacks. Yet, currently, the greatest environmental effect remains the threat of oil spills that could harm the possible prosperous fishing industry. As Houthi forces refuse to let UN members remove an oil tank from the Red Sea the risk of harming plentiful marine life will not only destroy the marine ecosystem but affect the supply of fish and crustaceans available (Yemen Events of 2020). Global warming remains a looming issue that while Yemen may contribute little to, will still feel the ill effects of (Lackner & Al-Eryani). Preoccupied with managing civil unrest, the nation is left unprepared for the future and the consequential rising land and sea temperatures. Yemen will likely continue to feel the environmental impact of the war years after it ends, continuing to affect its populations.

The crisis in Yemen can be addressed in several ways, with much of the current focus being on the alarming rates of severe malnutrition with the hope of bringing the country stability over time. Yemen is currently in a complicated and dangerous situation, making foreign intervention from governments with global influence and power, a frequently posed solution. Working to halt the fighting, militarily, and providing financial support from more stable and economically prosperous countries is often viewed as a practical option, but the solution does not reflect the reality of the situation. Currently, many nations that are perceived to be world powers are already involved in the war effort and have been for years. Countries like the United States, France, and Canada have all exploited the conflict, each selling weapons to nations within the Saudi-led coalition, causing further damage (Yemen Events of 2020). As the fighting has progressed these nations have been warned, over several years of the war crimes occurring and the

possibility of prosecution, yet there has not yet been accountability taken (Yemen Events 2020). As a result, the actions of the international community since 2015 have proven that foreign government intervention with positive intent is unlikely and that humanitarian aid has become the most effective option.

There are several humanitarian aid programs focused on helping the country of Yemen that are making large strides in combating hunger. Each organization is unique, focusing on different demographics, issues, and courses of action. Many provide emergency care through the distribution of food, medical treatment for malnutrition, and monetary assistance for families. Smaller contributions to long-term care such as providing training within farming and medicine have also occurred. Although many smaller organizations are doing their part some of the largest contributors include branches of the United Nations and the World Bank. These groups have greater reach than many charities and community-based projects allowing them to be able to support larger projects with greater funding. Still, they face several flaws including limited focus whether that be providing only emergency care or supporting a single demographic, which would leave the country as a whole to continue struggling. Many citizens would benefit from long-term structural programs as well as ways to support themselves and have security to be able to produce their food product once more. Alongside this limited scope of view lies the issue of budget cuts, especially for branches of the UN such as the World Food Program and the UNICEF which often stem from frustration at blockades. In the last year, drastic budget cuts have been seen as the UN hoped for 2.4 billion United States dollars to tackle the issue in Yemen and ended up with only 1.35 billion dollars, resulting in several projects being cut (Yemen Events of 2020). Finally, these aid workers also face the direct effects of war, forced to work around the fuel crisis, restrictions, and direct attacks that over time hinder projects, especially smaller ones from being able to move forward effectively. Still, there are several ways to tackle the issues occurring, improve the amount of care, and increase the number of Yemeni families aided.

A single humanitarian organization can not address every need within Yemen, as conflict has resulted in several different causes for hunger, with many of them linked. As a result, many work on smaller or more focused projects, such as providing their aid to children. As long as the conflict in Yemen continues the current issues will persist with no solution being able to meet the needs of every individual. However, greater collaboration among several of these organizations is one of the most productive ways to reach a larger population size and tackle issues that affect these humanitarian groups when they are alone. This has already occurred with several larger organizations that have collaborated as seen with The Emergency Health and Nutrition Project which partnered with UNICEF and the World Health Organization to provide health care and nutrition in Yemen (The World Bank In Yemen). The project is a perfect example of successful collaborative efforts through utilizing groups that have presence and experience within the country (Yemen Emergency Health ...). By introducing the groups to a single project, they were able to provide a large number of Yemeni people direly needed resources such as nutrition and sanitation supplies. Through collaboration, the different groups were able to lean into their strengths and provide large yields of quality donations. This further created a positive loop, with statistics given back to the international community bolstering financial support by providing evidence of successful and worthy aid efforts within the nation. On their own, each organization has its own goals and processes, such as

UNICEF's task of providing care for children but through collaboration, they were able to focus on a project that could be much greater than they could manage alone. At the end of the day, these groups get to keep their identity, while also receiving fresh ideas and a lessened financial burden. In these ways, many organizations and charities could work together and collaborate in ways to increase the amount of support and types of projects occurring in Yemen.

One of the most qualified organizations to run such a project would be the United Nations, as it remains globally influential and has experience working in Yemen. This would allow easier transfer of ideas and build a solid foundation to incorporate not only larger, well-known humanitarian groups but also smaller ones. Still, the focus of a collaborative project means that many organizations would be involved and the UN, while acting as the face of the project, would not have complete control. Such ideas require the different organizations to be flexible and work with many influences to play into the different group's strengths and weaknesses. If the UN were to have full authority this would not be possible, as even such a well-known organization faces hindrances such as their need for government approval on projects and their struggles with blockades. Blockades, for example, are one of the most pressing issues affecting the accessibility of aid given to Yemen. It has resulted in many funds given to large groups like the UN to go to waste, but through collaboration, other solutions could be found. Communication between the groups could lead to the solution of using those funds to provide aid to groups already within Yemen or local groups that can bypass the restrictions.

Collaboration would allow humanitarian groups that specialize in shipment aid to use their stagnant funds in several different ways. One would be to extend that aid to groups they could more easily communicate and work with until an opening for shipments occurs. Examples of local organizations include ones supported by the Yemeni people, such as MonaRelief, a Yemeni-founded group that uses its online presence to receive donations that are then used to create food baskets supplied by local markets (How You Can ...). These local organizations have the added benefit that they can support Yemen's economy alongside its people. Similarly, organizations such as the International Rescue Committee, Doctors Without Borders, and the Mwatana Organization for Human Rights all have established bases within Yemen that could use the finances to support those in need without worry of blockades or strict government permission (How You Can ...). Alongside this, while providing financial assistance, groups overseas that specialize in shipping donations and aid can create a collective force to place pressure on the warring groups. Such methods have over the years have proven to be effective in making strides to open up controlled regions. Instances include the increased pressure the UN, NGOs, and aid donors placed on Houthi groups in 2019 to step away from aid blocking, which resulted in the group signing off on backlogged project agreements (Deadly Consequences). A larger more organized collaborative force would be able to have a quicker and more pressing effect that could allow action to be taken against Hadi's government. Hadi's government similar to the Houthis applies blockades, yet the area is known to be less difficult and through these efforts could be dissuaded from building harsher blockade habits (Parker). Overall with a strong leading presence such as the UN and the allowance of each group to have their voices heard, communication can overcome many of the barriers that have affected aid.

Management through the UN would result in similar funding efforts that have been used in the past, relying mainly on donations. Through collaboration, the budget could be increased as donors would be

more likely to support if strides towards improvement despite blockades were being seen in Yemen. This would allow the projects to be more financially stable and efforts could be made towards more expensive ideas, while also allowing for the groups to continue their projects and funding programs. Typically many of these donations have come from nations, world leaders, and private donors (Symington & Khorsandi). Such ambitious efforts would also place more attention on these projects and are easily marketable to the public allowing communities to become involved. For example, many of these groups accept donations from individuals or community members, and by getting citizen support involved a large amount of money could be collected by these groups. Yemen as a community with its many different tribes and regional differences acts as a different obstacle, with a needed role of acceptance and cooperation with humanitarian groups being the key to changing and providing long-lasting change. Similarly, as many of these organizations are international, government support would be needed not only to run a complete operation and run smoothly but also to receive aid support and donations from members and different operations.

Such efforts would bring much-needed attention to these organizations and while several policies have been placed for the protection of humanitarian workers and ease the burden of providing aid abroad, these still need continued enforcement. The protection of volunteers and workers as well as providing them the ability to work alongside other nations is crucial in such large-scale projects. The fight to keep Yemen out of starvation is a global struggle, one that should include time taken to understand people and culture. Once emergency aid begins to reach a steady pace, long-term projects need to take note of cultural practices within Yemen and religious beliefs that may contradict some ideas. This includes new farming techniques or cultivation that may go against traditional farming and the cultivation of crops such as khat which are often consumed. It should also be addressed that in such tribal and diverse countries one solution may not work for an entire group and that long-term plans will run better if altered to fit different regions. General ideas to provide stability such as the introduction of improved farming, infrastructural rebuilding, job training, and educational programs can all be customized for different groups in Yemen. Over time this will allow for the regrowth of the land, rebuilding of cities, and improved standards of living which will lead to the available markets and fruitful agriculture aiding in ending hunger as more families will access well. These projects will be worked on for several years, as the need for support will never end until violence does, but by doing so funds can be allocated responsibly, and a plan to return the nation to stability can be ready for implementation.

For years, Yemen has remained wounded, its people hungry and its land ravaged creating direct effects on food access and agricultural production. Much of the nation has fallen victim to poverty, leading to great levels of malnutrition across almost the entire population. As the people of Yemen struggle in one of the worst conditions of any nation on earth, humanitarian aid is needed to both prevent starvation and implement measures to bring stability.

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