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Yemen, Factor 11: Malnutrition

Yemen: Starving Citizens, Starving World.

As a small country twice the size as Wyoming, war has ravaged Yemen and continues to do so leaving huge problems like malnutrition for much of Yemen's population. Yemen needs assistance now as the country is claimed by World Food Programme (WFP) Executive Director David Beasley to be "undeniably the world's worst humanitarian crisis by far." There is currently efforts being made to help Yemen, but it is not enough as twenty percent of the population continues to suffer from malnutrition as a result of poverty and job loss, lack of agricultural and arable land space, lack of effective foreign aid, and much more.

Yemen's terrain is made up of mountains and highlands, deserts, and plains. It is cut off from the northern countries of the Arabian Peninsula by vast stretches of desert (the Empty Quarter), so it has always been somewhat isolated. The climate varies with the terrain, from hot and dry in the desert, to hot and humid on the coasts, and mild in the highlands. Rainfall amounts also vary with the terrain, from monsoons (heavy downpours) in the western highlands, to none at all in the desert. Traditionally, most Yemenis have lived on farms and in small villages. "Urbanization—driven by a long drought, high population growth (Yemen has one of highest rates of population growth in the world, 3.2% annually in 2007), and lack of employment opportunities—began increasing in the 1990s. The largest cities are Sanaa, the political capital, with about 1,750,000 people; Aden, the economic capital, with 600,000 people; Taizz, with over 400,000 people; and Hodeida, with just around 340,000 people." "(Yemenis)" Living conditions are fairly difficult in most areas of Yemen. In rural areas, where most of the population continues to live, running water has been made available but sewer systems have yet to be installed. The water is often polluted, and diseases such as dysentery are common. Medical care is limited although the government has begun to establish some rural medical clinics. Few children are vaccinated, thus diseases like measles and tuberculosis spread quickly. Malnutrition is widespread. Buses and cars only recently replaced camels and donkeys as the primary mode of transportation, and few paved roads exist outside cities and large towns. The government has made new road construction a priority. Telephone services are very rare in rural villages, and there is no door-to-door postal delivery anywhere in the country. The population of Yemen is ethnically Arab, divided between Sunni Muslims and Shi'a Muslims. There are small groups of Hindu, Jews and Christians.

Lunch is the main meal in Yemen. Many Yemenis eat a traditional Yemen stew called Saltah along with flat bread and is considered Yemen's national meal. Staple meats in Yemen include Lamb, Chicken, and Goat and staple vegetables include tomatoes, onions, and potatoes. Pastries, tea, and coffee are often eaten for breakfast while dishes like Mashwi are eaten for dinner. Getting in meals in Yemen has gotten more difficult as result of war and poverty.

A Yemeni woman gives birth to an average of 7.7 children in her lifetime—many women bear more than 10. The average age for marriage is 22 for men and 18 for women, although it is not unknown for girls younger than 14 years old to marry. (In rural areas, girls as young as 12 or even 10 may marry.) Parents usually arrange marriages for their children. Historically, women in Yemen have had much less power in society than men. Despite gains made during women's political participation has been sidelined as a political issue in the wake of the current conflict. "Before the current crisis, Yemen was ranked 142 out of

142 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, a position it has held for almost a decade and which reflects its complex and diverse gender inequalities." (Conflict) Women are traditionally the primary caregivers at the household level. Women and girls have primary responsibility for cooking, cleaning, collecting water and firewood and childcare. They are also responsible to taking care of the elderly, sick and people living with disabilities. In addition to these roles, women provide sixty percent of the labor in crop cultivation, more than ninety percent in tending livestock while earning thirty percent less than men. When food is scarce, females are the first to eat less as a coping mechanism, even though they continue to do hard activities as for example working in the fields. The heavy care burden that falls to women limits their ability to engage in paid work. For girls, this burden often means they are unable to attend school. While women have a great capacity to contribute towards a food secure and resilient household and community, they are struggling with livelihood issues due to lack of mobility, decision-making power and access and control over resources (e.g. land and water), and a significantly lower income.

As of 2019, the population of Yemen is approximately thirty million. Of those thirty million approximately eighteen million are food insecure and twenty-two million needing humanitarian aid. The whole country is currently in a state of poverty. With the event of the war in Yemen, the poverty rate has doubled to sixty two percent and is estimated by the WFP that seventy five percent of Yemenis cannot afford the basics of life. Many Yemenis cannot even afford food because of inflation and the rise of food prices. The WFP states that food prices have risen thirty five percent in result of the rapid depreciation of the Riyal. Many Yemenis aren't getting paid as government salaries haven't been paid in two years and payments for public sector employees have been suspended affecting nearly thirty of Yemen's population who depend on government salaries and pensions Many families are currently buying food on credit because of lack of funds The rate of inflation of the riyal is extremely high contributing to the Yemenis not being able to obtain the food they need. UN officials have warned that the riyal will reach an exchange rate of "1,000 to the U.S. dollar." (Famine) This rate of inflation is destroying Yemen's economy and making food harder to afford.

"Agriculture employs more than half the labor force in Yemen." (Casey) As one could imagine Yemen's land is in ruins after multiple air strikes and the tolls of war, making it hard for workers to do their jobs. Around 3% of Yemen's land is arable and about half of that land is cultivated. That's not a lot to help feed Yemen's approximately thirty million people. Yemen's land is also very elevated, dry, and there are no permanent rivers. Dry desert land makes it hard to grow crops. However, the Western Highlands and Central Highlands (two regions in Yemen) can efficiently sustain crops. Along with topography issues, Yemen also experiences sand and dust storms resulting in crop damage of principle crops such as sorghum, potatoes, dates, wheat, grapes, barley, maize, cotton, millet, garden vegetables, and khat. Khat is a recreational stimulant used by many as well as a big cash crop. Around forty percent of Yemen's water supply goes towards irrigating Khat and it has a high income for farmers and large impact on Yemen's economy.

Yemen is extremely water scarce and is considered "the most water-scarce country in the Arab world," (Water) Ground water is Yemen's main source of water, but it is not always suitable for drinking and is not always accessible. The Yemeni people use their water for drinking, cooking, washing, and much more. Because of lack of clean sanitary water, diseases like Cholera spread easily. "An estimated twenty million Yemenis cannot access clean water and sanitation." (Water) This is a big issue as water is a necessity needed to survive. Because of Yemen's dry climate, water is needed to be stored for drinking and for crop irrigation.

Issues in Yemen's crop production lead to a solution every country would consider, importing from other countries. Yemen gets most of its imports from countries like China, India, Oman, and Brazil with China being their biggest importing country with imports worth over one and half billion U.S. dollars. "Yemen imports an estimated seventy to eighty percent of their food and medical supplies." (Casey) With more than sixty percent of their food needs imported including wheat, corn, rice, and sugar, shipping ports are extremely important to how the Yemenis live day to day. Not only are ports responsible for a big portion of Yemen's food supply, they are also responsible for a lot of Yemen's pharmaceuticals, fuels, and vehicles.

One major port city, Hodeidah, has been caught up in all the fighting. This is a huge problem as seventy of Yemen's supplies, both food and medical, arrive through Hodeidah. (Who are) Yemen depends on this major port for foreign aid supplied by other countries. Yemen also relies on this port to export oil. "Oil accounts for around 85% of Yemen's exports," (Yemen exports) making oil one of Yemen's biggest exports and money makers. The port has been under Houthi control and amongst the fighting since 2014 the flow of aid is reported to have frequently been held up by the rebels Without full use of the port, Yemen loses both money and foreign aid supplies to help and better their people.

Not only is the lack of port use an issue for getting food and medical supplies to the people of Yemen, airstrikes have destroyed roads and bridges, cutting off passage way for trucks carrying supplies to get through. Once those trucks make it to a warehouse, more problems arise. Just recently, wheat supplies near Hodeida have been tested and confirmed to be infested with insects. Now, fumigation efforts are needed to ensure that the wheat is safe for consumption. In addition to this, the U.N. has accused the Houthis of stealing aid from those in need as a survey done by the WFP articulated that the aid is only reaching forty percent of its desired recipients.

Malnutrition rates are extremely high in Yemen, especially for women and children. A recent survey showed that almost one third of families have gaps in their diets, and hardly ever consume foods like pulses, vegetables, fruit, dairy products or meat, Without consumption of vegetables, fruit, dairy, or meat, many of the food groups are not covered in the Yemenis diets resulting in a lack of crucial vitamins. Around three million women and children are acutely malnourished and almost two-thirds of that number are children (Klose) Many women are giving birth in a malnourished state to smaller babies that have a low chance of surviving because of the expensive care needed. An estimated four hundred thousand children that are under the age of five suffer from severe acute malnutrition. (Yemen) UNICEF estimates that only fifteen percent of children are eating as much as they should in order to grow and develop properly Malnourished children can have stunted growth, social and cognitive development issues, and are more susceptible to diseases. The malnourished also miss out on education and everyday life as most of their time is spent in the hospital. Depriving children of good education destroys Yemen's future generations to come.

The malnourished being high risk for disease ultimately continues the spread of diseases like Cholera, a bacterial disease spread through contaminated food and water. Yemen is in the midst of a Cholera outbreak, and it is claimed to be the largest one in history. Victims of cholera can suffer from cramping, diarrhea, and dehydration. Cholera, without treatment, results in death within just hours. The disease spreads quickly throughout Yemen with an average of "five thousand people a day contracting cholera in 2017."(Sifferlin)

Malaria Mosquitos have the perfect breeding ground along the Tihama, a large, flat, coastal plain along Yemen's red sea coastline. This region is extremely marshy, giving mosquitos the water and moisture,

they need to lay eggs. Malaria is a deadly disease that shows symptoms ten to fifteen days after being bit. Symptoms include fever, tiredness, vomiting, and headaches. In severe cases, death Malaria tends to strike Yemen near the rainy season. An article by Relief Web states More than seventy five percent of Yemen's population lives in at-risk areas, with twenty five percent living in high-risk areas. Limited access to clean water and sanitation has significantly increased the risk of infectious diseases, such as dengue fever and malaria further spreading Young malnourished children who are susceptible to disease are at high risk for malaria and can continue the spread of the disease.

Yemen has trouble combating against malnutrition and disease as hospitals are scarce and overcrowded. "A little over half of Yemen's thirty-five thousand healthcare facilities are up and running." (Yemen Crisis) and most of the facilities are packed. It is not nearly enough for the suffering people in Yemen. An official at Khayran al-Maharraq hospital said the facility receives more than sixty cases of severe malnutrition a month but has to send them elsewhere because it has no supplies," Organizations like UNICEF are sending in supplies but there is still a great need. Cholera treatment requires oral rehydration solutions, IVs, and antibiotics, supplies that Yemen just doesn't have enough of. Without treatment, a whole generation of the Yemeni people will die off, meaning lack of hope for the nation ever getting better.

Regaining a nation claimed by disease, war, poverty, and malnutrition will not be an easy process. The Republic of Yemen needs to put their citizens first, above and protected from the effects of war as schools, hospitals, and homes are places of peace and not war.

In December of 2018, Sweden negotiated a ceasefire agreement between the Houthi rebels and Yemen's government for Hodeida city. A powerful move as reduction of war tolls from the Hodeida port will allow more foreign aid to reach the Yemeni people than ever before, something desperately needed if the people of Yemen are going to continue to survive. The Yemeni people currently get humanitarian assistance from the UN, WFP, UNICEF, and more. Aid can come as, but not limited to, food, medical kits and beds, and water. Not only can foreign aid come in easier, foods the country usually imports can come in easier as well.

There needs to be designated safe spots in Yemen as war should not be allowed to ravage wherever it pleases. Safe spots should include hospitals, communities, schools, markets, and places of work. Countries could send in military alliance not to go to war but to help guard safe spots of the country, preventing war, and furthering support of foreign aid.

Once there are safe spots implemented in Yemen, more aid than ever could be implemented, and the Yemeni people can get back to their lives. The use of dieticians is very important in regaining weight after being acutely malnourished. Sending dieticians over to Yemen's safe spots can boost the health and knowledge of the many malnourished Yemenis. The rebuilding of hospitals and buildings that could be converted to health centers is important in aiding the many struggling because of lack of hospital beds and space. Doctors and medical staff currently aiding the Yemeni people aren't getting paid but continue to do their jobs as Yemen is in a crisis. In an article by Relief Web a doctor is interviewed, "Dr Anisa is now a GP working in one of the only clinics where people can get free healthcare. Patients travel for hours to see her every day," (Yemen's Healthcare) Supporting patients can make a big difference in boosting the health of a community, if patients have a place to stay closer to the hospital or health center, they wouldn't have to spend so much money on expensive gas to travel back and forth daily. Supporting patients can be in the form of rebuilding or building new clinics or hospital buildings to provide more room for patients that need it.

The international community must urge both sides in the Yemen conflict to reopen the sea and airports for the importation of food, medicines, and other vital needs. The international community must provide enough funding to ensure that the current and increasing humanitarian needs of Yemenis are met in 2019 and 2020. Funding and logistic support from the international community such as cargo planes, storage and expertise will be needed to enable enough quantities of aid supplies to be housed and delivered when necessary. The international community must increase pressure on warring parties and their international allies to return to negotiations to set up a peace process, and to impose an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire across the country. The United Nations World Food Programme has been distributing food and providing health services throughout Yemen since 2015. These programs must be increased in coordination and partnership with other international programs.

Some structural focus and intervention to supporting markets and distribution could be applied across the country bringing people together in time of need. “The marketing system for agricultural products in Yemen has many deficiencies that do not allow the farmer to profit maximally, and do not provide the products in the quality and quantity demanded.” (Mujawar) To strengthen the marketing system, increased organization through development of various associations and cooperatives will strengthen the system and make improvements in quality and information possible. Currently, the marketing system in Yemen is very traditional, with farmers taking their produce or livestock to market, and dealing with the traders as they have for hundreds of years. Farmers lack the information needed to understand the true value of their products in distant markets, and what qualities are demanded. Formation of marketing cooperatives, associations, or community level groups can greatly assist in the expansion of value to the farmer. Farmers and commercial producers can benefit from creating effective industry-wide associations that can provide marketing information to all producers. For instance, a national coffee, mango, or onion association could gather information on domestic and international markets, and provide this to the members, as well as acting as an information source on production, legislative, or quality issues. Currently, individual producers do not have access to this information, which could be key to improving their productivity and profitability, which in turn can allow them to grow and hire more rural labor. “Strengthening the role of cooperatives and associations will require extensive training in functions of cooperatives either directly or through intermediary groups such as the Agricultural Cooperative Union or other MAI departments. In addition, laws and regulations regarding should be reviewed to ensure that the Cooperative Law of 1998 is still meeting its objectives. There is also an important role for NGOs and donor organizations to assist in developing community level cooperatives.” (Mujawar) The concept of trade associations should be introduced to assist in the marketing and dissemination of technical advice for specific commodity groups.

Water Treatment plants should also be included in safe spots. The water treatment plants also need to meet standards as many do not meet the standards for fecal coliform. Water quality issues and good water quality indication needs to be taught in schools to create a more educated community. There are many factors in Yemen contributing to water quality issues including waste water from hospitals not being disposed of properly. Another solution for boosting water available for use would be to use less water irrigating khat as it doesn't feed the malnourished Yemenis and the water could go to better use like irrigating crops that contribute to Yemen's diet. This would provide more food for Yemen's growing population.

Helping Yemen get to a stable state after being the acclaimed “worlds worst humanitarian crisis,” will not be an easy process. Many lives have been claimed by preventable causes such as not having enough to eat, and disease spread because of lack of water sanitation. War needs to come to a halt and all focus

needs to go on Yemen's citizens. This means doing whatever it takes to aid Yemen's people. Without the children that are dying from preventable causes, Yemen has no hope for its future, generation is at loss. Children in Yemen facing war have so much potential for bettering their country, but many cannot as issues persist, and their lives are being put at stake. Yemen's citizens starving correlates with the country starving because humans are truly the most valuable resource in hope for bettering one's community, country, and world.

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